THE LIFE OF UNION WITH GOD

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THE LIFE OF UNION WITH GOD, AND THE MEANS OF ATTAINING IT, ACCORDING TO THE GREAT MASTERS OF SPIRITUALITY

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by E. J. STRICKLAND

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

IN WHAT PERFECTION CONSISTS

		PAGE
1.	The desire of perfection and the hope of attaining it	1
2.	The two constituent parts of perfection: entire conformity to the will of God, and intimate union with him	2
3.	The state of union is a particular grace given by God	4
4.	The nature of the prayer of the perfect	6
5.	The lawful desire for this kind of prayer and the best way to prepare for it	8
6.	Summing up of the doctrine of the unitive way	9
7.	The loving union and contemplation	12
8.	The authority of spiritual writers	15
9.	Are all called to perfection and the life of union?	16

CHAPTER II

THE TEACHING OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: THE GREEK FATHERS

1.	Clement of Alexandria	18
2.	Origen	24
3.	St Athanasius	26
4.	St Macarius	27
5.	St Basil	35
6.	St Gregory of Nyssa	36
7.	St Ephrem	38
8.	St Gregory Nazianzen	39
9.	St Diadochus	40
10.	Dionysius the Mystic	49
11.	St Maximus	53
12.	Thalassius	61
13.	St John Damascene	63

CHAPTER III

THE FATHERS OF THE LATIN CHURCH

PAGE

1. St Ambrose - - - - - - - - - 66
2. St Augustine - - - - - - - - 68
3. Cassian - - - - - - - - - 73
   (1) Method for the attainment of perfect prayer - - 74
   (2) A description of perfect prayer - - - - 79
4. St Gregory the Great - - - - - - - 82
   (1) The contemplative life, third degree of the spiritual life - - - - - - - - 83
   (2) Contemplation as gift and recompense - - - 85
   (3) Methods of arriving at contemplation - - - 87
   (4) A description of the different contemplative states - 95
   (5) Action and contemplation - - - - 101
   (6) The fruits of contemplation - - - - 105
5. The Venerable Bede - - - - - - 108
6. St Peter Damian - - - - - - - 108

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

1. St Bernard - - - - - - - - - 111
   (1) The desire of contemplation and of divine union - 111
   (2) The union of contemplation, the heritage of the perfect 117
   (3) By what means we may attain to divine union - 119
   (4) In what divine union consists - - - - 125
2. Hugh of St Victor - - - - - - - 130
3. Richard of St Victor - - - - - - 132
   (1) On the destruction of evil and progress in virtue - 133
   (2) On forming the interior man - - - - 134
   (3) *Benjamin Minor*, or On the Preparation of the Soul for Contemplation - - - - - 135
   (4) *Benjamin Minor*, or On Contemplation - - 136
4. The Ladder of the Cloister (*Scala Claustralium*) - - 142
   (1) The four degrees of spiritual exercises - - - 142
   (2) A description of the functions of the four degrees - 143
   (3) The work of contemplation - - - - 143
   (4) Signs of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the soul - 144
   (5) The eclipse of grace - - - - - 144
   (6) This temporary withdrawal of grace is advantageous 145
   (7) How the soul should behave after the visit of divine grace - - - - - - - 146
   (8) Summary of the preceding - - - - 146

PAGE

(9) Reading is unprofitable without meditation, and meditation without prayer - - - - 146
(10) In what way the degrees already indicated are mutually linked together - - - - 147
(11) The four obstacles to these four degrees - - 148

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

1. Blessed Albert the Great - - - - - - - 149
2. St Thomas Aquinas - - - - - - - - 154
3. St Bonaventure - - - - - - - - 158
(1) Prologue - - - - - - - - 159
(2) Of the degrees of this rising to God, and of the consideration of God through the traces of his creative action left in the universe - - - 160
(3) God manifests himself in the traces which his creative action has left in the visible world - - - 163
(4) God beheld in his image, which is the soul endowed with its natural faculties - - - - 163
(5) God beheld in a soul in the state of grace the true image of God - - - - - - - 164
(6) On the consideration of the divine Unity by its principal name, which is Being - - - 165
(7) On the contemplation of the ever-blessed Trinity - 166
(8) On mental and mysterious rapture, wherein, rest being given to the understanding, the affection is entirely centred in God - - - - 167
4. Franciscan Authors: David of Augsburg, Rudolf of Biberach, James of Milan, Henry of Baume - - - - 169

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

1. Tauler - - - - - - - - - 173
(1) Contemplation and the means of attaining it - - 173
(2) Naked faith - - - - - - - 176
(3) Union with God - - - - - - - 177
(4) The true friends of God - - - - - 179
(5) God alone - - - - - - - - 181
(6) The transition from meditation to contemplation - 184
2. Blessed Henry Suso - - - - - - - 186
(1) How we ought to live interiorly - - - - 186
(2) True perfection - - - - - - 187
(3) The obstacles to be overcome, and the means to make use of in order to attain perfection - - - 188

PAGE
(4) Union with God - - - - - - - 195
(5) The interior exercises that the fervent soul should practise - - - - - - 195

CHAPTER VII

MYSTICAL DOCTRINE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

1. St Vincent Ferrer - - - - - - - 197
2. Gerson - - - - - - - - - 199
(1) " Mystical Theology " (doctrinal part) - - - 199
(2) " Mystical Theology " (practical part) - - - 204
(3) " The Mount of Contemplation " - - - 207
3. St Laurence Justinian - - - - - - 209
4. " The Imitation of Christ " - - - - - 211

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1. Louis of Blois - - - - - - - 216
2. St Teresa - - - - - - - 220
(1) The three methods of prayer - - - 221
(2) Desire of ordinary contemplation - - 223
(3) Preparation for contemplation - - - 228
(4) Ordinary contemplation, the prayer of the perfect - 234
3. St John of the Cross - - - - - - 238
(1) The active night of the soul - - - 238
(2) Passive night of the sensitive faculties - - 240
(3) How to act in the trials of purification - - 244
(4) The night of the spirit - - - - 246
4. Deviation from the traditional doctrine - - - 247

CHAPTER IX

MYSTICAL DOCTRINE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1. St Alphonsus Rodriguez - - - - - - 262
2. Suarez - - - - - - - - 265
3. The Venerable Luis de la Puente - - - - - 273
4. St Francis de Sales and St Jane de Chantal - - - 278
5. The mystical theologians of the seventeenth century - - 283
John of Jesus-Mary - - - - - - 283
6. Le Gaudier - - - - - - - 285
7. Alvarez de Paz - - - - - - - 289

PAGE

8. Cardinal Bona - - - - - - - 292
9. Philip of the Holy Trinity - - - - - - 294
10. Thomas of Vallgornera - - - - - - 295
11. Brancati de Laurea - - - - - - - 296
12. Fr. Lallemant and his disciples - - - - - 297
13. The antimystic reaction in the seventeenth century - - 300
14. Abuse of mystical doctrines - - - - - 302

CHAPTER X

MYSTICISM SINCE THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1. First half of the eighteenth century - - - - 307
Caussade, St John Baptist de la Salle - - - 307
2. Second half of the eighteenth century - - - - 308
Scaramelli, St Alphonsus Liguori, Grou - - - 308
3. Mysticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - - 312

CHAPTER XI

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

1. Perfection implies eminent graces - - - - 314
2. Contemplative union the end of the spiritual life - - 316
3. The way to prepare for the divine union - - - 318
(1) Recollection - - - - - - - 319
(2) Abnegation - - - - - - - 320
(3) Prayer - - - - - - - - 323
(4) A method for practising the prayer of loving union for the use of those who have an attraction for it - 324

CONCLUSION - - - - - - - - 327

ANALYTICAL INDEX - - - - - - - 329

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THE
LIFE OF UNION WITH GOD

CHAPTER I

IN WHAT PERFECTION CONSISTS

1. *The desire of perfection and the hope of attaining it.*

1. THIS book is addressed to the fervent, to those who entertain the noble ambition of rising to a high degree of virtue, and have formed a firm and generous purpose of increasing daily in the love of God. Far from seeking to throw cold water on their holy desire, we can only congratulate them and encourage their legitimate aspirations. In fact, the first condition for great progress in the spiritual life is to have a great desire and hope of attaining a high degree of perfection.

2. St Teresa tells us to have great confidence and not to limit our desires, and to believe that, supported by God and sustained by his grace, we shall arrive by constant effort at the perfection which so many saints have attained. Had they never entertained these great desires and gradually realized them, they would never have reached such a high state. God expects and loves generosity, accompanied with humility and self-distrust. "Never," she writes, "have I known such a one left in the first stages of the spiritual life. Neither have I ever found a shrinking character sheltering under the cloak of humility make as much progress in many long years as the generous make in a short time. I am lost in astonishment when I behold the rapid progress of those whose courage has enabled them to undertake great things" (*Life*, ch. xiii).

3. Fr. Surin says: "A very ordinary temptation of many of God's servants is to limit their love and to entertain too petty and low ideas in the service of God. I know of no evil so universal nor so insidious and difficult to cure. . . . Were I urged to give the reason why there

are so few saints while so many profess to serve God, I would reply that it is because they have not high aspirations" (*Amour de Dieu*, I, ch. x.).

For the director of souls it is the first principle of spiritual science to bring to light, to develop, and to maintain in others these great desires and hopes.

2. *The two constituent parts of perfection: entire conformity to the will of God, and intimate union with him.*

4. It is important also to have a clear and definite idea of perfection, for if one speaks of it in a vague way, without outline or colour, very little attraction will be excited, and the effort to attain it will be less energetic.

What, then, is perfection?

Perfection is charity, a charity strong enough to produce an habitual renunciation of everything that prevents the soul belonging entirely to God,[1] a charity which destroys all purely natural attachments,[2] which habitually wills only what God wills, and consequently loves all things only in God and for God. It is thus perfect conformity to the divine will. Perfection consists also in a life of union with God in every thought and affection, a life entirely filled with loving recollection of God; this is the teaching of theologians. They divide the spiritual life into three phases—the purgative for beginners, the illuminative for the more advanced, and the unitive for the perfect.

5. Which of these two definitions is best?

There is in reality no difference; the two explanations have the same meaning; each confirms and completes the other. He who is not united to God, and who does not live in constant and intimate communion with him, retains many attachments, allows himself many voluntary imperfections, and even many faults; not having an habitual recollection, he is not sufficiently guarded against the fascination of creatures. Therefore there can be no real conformity without an habitual union of mind and heart with God. Neither can there be union with God without perfect conformity of will. He who has not arrived at perfect detachment from creatures cannot remain united to God; the objects of his affections will take up too much of his thoughts, the desire of having his own will accomplished, or the fear of worries and contradictions will produce too many distractions, and will often so entirely

[1] *Summa Theol.*, II-II, Q. 184, a. 2.
[2] *Cf.* St John of the Cross, *Ascent of Carmel*, ii, 5.

absorb his attention that he will lose sight for a long time of the presence of God.

6. It follows, then, that perfection cannot consist in only making a good intention each morning and renewing it from time to time during the day. The heart of man is so weak, so carried away by its inclinations and tastes, that it is necessary to cultivate a more active love in order to remain faithful to God. Who, by the offering of his actions to God at intervals more or less lengthy, can flatter himself on always remaining in a state of perfect detachment, on not retaining habitually in his heart some voluntary and natural affection to his inclinations, whims, and caprices?

7. And is it not the usual experience that this union of love, indispensable as it is to perfection, is that to which the fervent aspire, of which they feel the necessity, and to which the perfect have, in fact, attained?

Have not all directors had to listen to their distress at having lost sight of God for too long among the multiplicity of their affairs and the preoccupations these entail? The desire they have for a closer and more constant union is a sign of fervour; but the number of obstacles in their path keeps them far from their goal. These are a tendency to dissipations inadequately combated, constant self-indulgence, and consequent attachments—slight, but wilful; a want of application to prayer, too great an eagerness about even necessary matters, anxieties or excessive cares, and frequent day-dreams. These dispositions, much opposed to the grace of union, are too common even with persons who possess a strong living faith. On this account many remain in the illuminative way until they die, and never arrive at the unitive.[1] But there are others who, having struggled on generously, know how to profit by these trials. Gradually, thanks to their generosity, all these obstacles vanish, and at the appointed moment God bestows on them the desired grace of union. They receive it at first only in a limited manner, and at intervals, but by corresponding to the fresh graces bestowed on them, and stripping themselves completely of self-love, it becomes habitual, and henceforth their recollection of God seldom leaves them; in the midst of their occupations his love fills their hearts, and all that is best in them is occupied with him. Should serious matters engross their attention for a time, they quickly return to God, and, living in his presence, are, according to Holy Scripture, perfect—*Ambula coram eo, et esto perfectus.*

[1] *Cf.* Suarez, *De orat. ment.*, ch. xi, n. 3, *infra*, No. 365.

3. *The state of union is a particular grace given by God.*

8. Could anyone, by dint of efforts of virtue, or of continual vigilance and habits painfully acquired, either merit, or acquire as a right, this union with God, such as is here described? We do not think so.[1] Even if it be admitted with certain theologians that there are actual graces that can be merited *de condigno*,[2] it does not seem that, strictly speaking, we can have a right to those eminent actual graces necessary for the state of union. It is well known that God gives these graces whensoever he pleases.[3] He can certainly withdraw from the world a very faithful person when he is ready to receive them. Can he not also just as easily prolong life for as long a time as he deems fit without raising this person to such a high state? This proves that no one can claim it as an absolute right. The saints tell us that God does not refuse mystical graces to those who are faithful; but they add that the motive for this concession is the divine goodness, not the divine justice.

Ordinary actual grace does not suffice to produce mystical union; it requires a grace of a different nature, a particular act of the Holy Spirit enlightening the soul and enabling it to understand the divine condescension, and communicating to it a powerful and all-pervading charity.

To know is to love; an imperfect knowledge usually produces a feeble love. God, who is wise and perfect in all his ways, does not usually act upon the will without first enlightening the understanding.

9. Let us consider those who have arrived at perfection. Even some who are ignorant of human learning are wonderfully enlightened about things spiritual. Who better understands the deformity of sin, of which they have the greatest horror, or the beauty of virtue, the glory of purity, the necessity for self-sacrifice, or the value of the soul? Who realizes more than they the nothingness of creatures? They are so persuaded of their own misery that humility seems natural to them, and

[1] However, there are some who think so, like Fr. Arintero, *Cuestiones místicas*, C. 2, A. 6.

[2] Others dispute this. Catholic tradition, which teaches that the means of obtaining sanctifying grace, or of increasing it, are the sacraments and merits, always indicates as means of obtaining actual grace the sacraments and prayer, but not merits.

[3] "No dejara de conceder a cada cual a su hora (*hora que El solo sabe*) ese premio asi prometido." This is what Fr. Arintero says himself (*l.c.*, p. 258).

makes them dead to attacks of pride and vainglory, against which so many vainly struggle. They exclaim with more sincerity than any: "We are useless servants!" They never feel that they have done enough for God, and from the way in which they serve him, pray to him, and love him may be gathered the high conceptions they have formed of him. Truly none have ever held more accurate ideas of the greatness of God, of his sanctity, justice, goodness, and beauty; none have ever been more impressed by the thought of eternity, of the torments of hell, or the rapturous joys of heaven. So that, on the important questions of religion, the perfect have more light than ordinary Christians.

10. But how have they acquired this light? Not by study; others may have studied more and may appear in the eyes of men better instructed, but are far from beholding in God all his goodness and grandeur. Nor yet by their own reflections, for many who have reflected more and possess a keener insight are very far from an equal enlightenment. In short, ideas acquired by study and reasoning can always be explained in human language, but the perfect can find no terms by which to explain their thoughts on the great truths. The light they possess, being above that of ordinary mortals, *proceeds directly from God* and is the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

11. While thus enlightening the understanding of his faithful servants, the Holy Spirit also *acts immediately on their will* to make virtue attractive to them and to fill their hearts with his love. From this follows that intense interior life of the perfect, that constant communication with God even during times of aridity, which their own reflections and efforts could not have induced, nor yet have produced that profound sense of union with God and thirst for God which they experience. It is also from the Holy Spirit that they receive strength to practise those virtues which without him they could not have acquired, and which now, going before or at least surpassing their own reflections and efforts, enable them to accomplish things that would formerly have appeared impossible. If during their most terrible trials their confidence in God remains unshaken, if in the severest pains they experience an unspeakable happiness in suffering for God, to him only, as they understand better than anyone else, do they owe this special grace. Their constancy and supernatural fortitude also are fruits of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.[1]

[1] I follow here, as in the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, the opinion of St Thomas and of other great theologians, who see in the gifts the

4. The nature of the prayer of the perfect.

12. The Spirit of God acting strongly and sweetly on every soul is more prodigal of his graces to those who are faithful; enlightenments and fervent impulses of love are, with them, much more frequent. If it were otherwise they would not be able to maintain their habitual conformity to the divine will, which prevents all failings except those that are light and infrequent, and they would therefore cease to remain in the state of perfection.

13. It is chiefly, however, at the time of prayer that the perfect receive these graces of light and of love. When they place themselves in communication with God, the thought of the divine goodness and greatness takes hold of them and fills their imagination. They no longer require, as formerly, long considerations to enkindle the fire of divine love, or to make or to strengthen good resolutions. Being determined to serve and to glorify God as much as they possibly can, they have no need of lengthy reasonings, which only cause them fatigue and tedium; they tend always, with an ever-increasing desire, to the love of God, to praise and magnify him, to unite with him, to rejoice in his perfections, to conform to his holy will, to long that he may be known, loved, and glorified everywhere and by all men. These feelings also are so deep and intense that often it is impossible to express them, so they do not attempt it, but are content to remain, as it were, in an abyss of admiration, respect, and love.

14. It is not always given to those who serve God perfectly to enjoy this kind of prayer. The influence of grace which enlightens and inflames them does not always pervade the whole soul so as to absorb all its faculties.

Whoever has attentively observed what takes place interiorly has remarked a singular phenomenon; sometimes the different faculties—the imagination, sensitive appetite, understanding, and will—act in harmony; at others in a different manner and even contrary to each other. As Louis XIV said to Racine, alluding to the combat between the two natures in man so forcibly depicted by this great poet: "Oh, I know all about that!" We all know about

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habitus giving power to produce acts superior to ordinary acts of virtue and of a different order. Those who do not follow this opinion will at least not deny that there are gradations in the divine help, and that to arrive at the degree of light and strength which has just been described, graces of another order than those of the mass of the faithful are needed. We thus leave the domain of asceticism for that of mysticism.

it, we have all experienced the painful strivings of contrary tendencies within us. The perfect as well as the imperfect have felt their lower appetites inclining them to evil while their will adheres firmly to good, and, even at times devoted to prayer, they are distracted by imaginations that their will resists directly they become conscious of them. This division of the powers of the soul is hardly more accentuated in ordinary Christians. To regain their communication with God they have to control the imagination and to fill their minds with holy thoughts, because it is by pious reflections and arguments that the will is moved and the heart filled with lively affections.

The more advanced Christians who are favoured with the enlightenment spoken of above can testify to an even more astonishing phenomenon in themselves. It happens to them sometimes, and to some very often, to preserve in the higher part of the soul a certain consciousness of the divine greatness, and to experience an indistinct attraction towards God even when the imagination is employed on other objects, whether sacred or profane, and while the lower part of the understanding is reasoning and indulging in all sorts of reflections. Doubtless it would be better if at such times all their faculties were directed towards God, but nevertheless they remain united to him by love.

15. This, then, is the condition of those who are perfect, when they have recourse to God; and this is the kind of prayer that suits them; it is also the best for feeding and increasing their love. To make use of an expression which no one will be inclined to contradict, we will call this state a loving union, and by this is meant not only that complete loving union which takes the whole soul captive and occupies all the faculties, but also that which exists in the midst of the digressions of the imagination and understanding, and even occasionally in the midst of the struggles incidental to temptations.

16. Is this loving union bestowed on all the perfect when communicating with God in prayer?

God, who is ever the ruler of his own gifts, is not bound to grant this sort of prayer even to the most faithful. Besides, this sort of prayer is not indispensable. If it seem difficult and almost impossible to attain the state of perfection without the eminent graces described above, it does not necessarily follow that these graces should be always given during prayer. We cannot therefore decide *a priori* that the sort of prayer mentioned above is common to all in a state of perfection. It seems, it is true, hardly credible that this grace should be refused for any

length of time to those who are well prepared to receive it, and that they should be led by lower paths unsuited to their interior dispositions.[1] However, we must have recourse to the experience and authority of the masters of the spiritual life to know whether this prayer is in fact generally given to the faithful who know how to overcome obstacles, and who do all in their power to obtain it. Experience and these masters teach that exceptions are rare, and that if God grant it to one earlier, to another later, he does not refuse it definitely. If to some he gives it habitually and in all its perfection, and to others only from time to time and seldom in a way to engross every faculty, at least there are very few who do not receive it in some degree.[2]

5. *The lawful desire for this kind of prayer and the best way to prepare for it.*

17. St Augustine says that we learn to love by loving. Those eager for love are desirous of that prayer in which love is free to act, and wherein it makes the greatest progress. He who fixes his eyes on the divine perfections, whether considering them in a general way or each one in particular, apprehends them vividly, thanks to the graces received, and is entirely imbued with them; the act of love then made cannot fail to be fervent, and of great value in the sight of God. Is not such a method of prayer supremely desirable?

If a little child should take a fancy to water the flowers in a border, he could only make use of a very small watering-can, but if he saw an elder brother taking a great deal of water and using it copiously on the flowers and plants in his father's garden, would it not be quite natural and lawful for him to envy his brother's powers and to long for the time when he would be strong enough to work as well? In like manner, many who have trouble in raising their hearts to God are anxious to enjoy the sort of prayer with which their brethren are favoured.

18. But the little child ought to wait patiently, for if in

[1] Nearly all the perfect who at first sight seem not to be contemplatives, are in a state of dry contemplation.

[2] To those who think that experience proves the contrary, and who, doubtless, will be astonished at the texts of the great masters which they read, I will repeat simply what I have said elsewhere (*Degrees*, t. II, l. V, ch. v, §10). Many souls who are in the state of loving union do not know it, and do not show it. They do not explain the manner in which God operates within them, and so it frequently happens that their director himself has no idea of the nature of the graces that are bestowed on them.

imitation of his brother he plunge into the water a bucket that his feeble hands cannot lift, his efforts would be vain, and he would even expose himself to danger. This is an image of one who is fervent before he has received the prayer of loving union. Nothing is more natural than that he should desire and ask for it, and nothing more lawful; he does it spontaneously, almost unconsciously, when he regrets his inability to pray better and sighs for the gift of perfect prayer. Should he, however, desire to forestall God's time, and seek to put himself in the state of union here described, his efforts will only end in failure. Such conduct would be thoughtless and reckless.

19. Has he, then, nothing more to do, and should he, like the little child we have depicted, expect everything from patient waiting? No; he can hasten the hour of grace. Our Lord does not indefinitely refuse this favour to those who have a holy thirst for it and whose interior dispositions render them capable of receiving it. We have considered the obstacles which ordinarily prevent this signal grace; they are faulty attachments, confidences and dissipation, immoderate cares and anxieties, and giving too little time to prayer. Therefore, he who applies himself zealously to this holy exercise, who loves and meditates on the infinite goodness of God, and resists distractions, or becomes more ready to resist them by a universal act of renunciation and a continual recollection, prepares to receive this grace, and may hope for the visit of the Lord.

In order to clear up this question with exactitude—for one cannot be too careful about it—we will recapitulate in a few propositions the doctrine of the unitive way.

6. *Summing up of the doctrine of the unitive way.*

20. Firstly: The end of the spiritual life, the goal to which it tends, and to which it leads usually if the soul is faithful, is an intimate communion with God. It is a state wherein, being enlightened in a wonderful manner as to the divine perfections, one becomes united to God by acts of very perfect love.

Secondly: These strong illuminations do not spring from the laboured reasoning of meditation; *they are not acquired, but received.* They are, like the acts of love which accompany them, effects of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Thirdly: In this state frequent acts of love are made, and these acts are intense and pure; when not renewed,

however, a very perfect state of love is retained, with a more or less conscious determination to serve God alone.

Fourthly: This state, so glorious to God and so advantageous to oneself and one's neighbour, is greatly to be desired, and should be earnestly prayed for and aspired after.

Fifthly: As these illuminations, which are the source of unitive love, are neither the fruits of our own efforts nor to be acquired by study and meditation, they must be regarded as a special grace from God, given by him according to the dictates of his wisdom and good pleasure.

Sixthly: In his infinite goodness God does not usually refuse this gift to those who are really faithful and near to perfection.

Seventhly: It happens occasionally that this grace is received suddenly, without anything, or with very little, having been done by the recipient to become fit for it.

Eighthly: The usual course, however, is for grace to accommodate itself to the state of souls, which, by putting themselves in the right dispositions, may acquire such favours, or render them more easy and frequent.

Ninthly: To prepare for them it is necessary to practise a generous mortification and an entire renunciation, because voluntary attachments, by turning the mind and the heart away from God, are obstacles to the union of love.

Tenthly: Also a strict recollection is necessary, and avoidance of all anxieties, day-dreams and useless thoughts.

Eleventhly: That which greatly favours the action of the grace of union is to forget, as much as possible, all that is perceptible to the senses, to attend to God alone, and to plunge oneself into the abyss of his infinite perfections.

Twelfthly: As our Lord is the way to the eternal Father, it would be a serious mistake to imagine that by losing sight of him one could more easily attain this loving union. On the contrary, he would be better disposed to receive this favour who considers first the incomprehensible divinity of our Saviour, and then his most holy humanity.

Thirteenthly: But these dispositions, however ardent and faithful they may be, do not give a right to the favour of loving union, even in its lowest degree; therefore it is an error to wish to obtain it by one's own efforts before being called to it by God.

Fourteenthly: The state of loving union contains many degrees. The most essential, and, in fact, the foundation

of it, is a vivid light on the divine greatness, perceived by a sort of indistinct intuition. This light acts on the apex of the soul, and at the same time God infuses his love into that highest part which is far above the senses.

Fifteenthly: If this loving union goes no further, there is but a confused knowledge of it, and there may even remain doubts as to one's dispositions of love, for the senses receive no satisfaction, and, as the understanding and imagination are not laid hold of, they are often difficult to control and to prevent wandering to all sorts of subjects.

Sixteenthly: The state of dry loving union may last for a length of time, either by the will of God or for reasons known only to God, or on account of voluntary or involuntary obstacles which prevent it becoming more complete.

Seventeenthly: The union of love may affect the sensitive appetite. In this case it is felt, and its sweetness enjoyed, but the understanding is not mastered, or only partially; the imagination has no share in it, and many painful distractions may be the consequence.

Eighteenthly: This sensible union of love is sweeter than that which is dry, but not more perfect, because the degree of perfection depends on the degree of love, and this is in the will and not in the part which the sensitive appetite has in this love.

Nineteenthly: The union of love is complete when all the powers participate in it; when the imagination is mastered, the understanding is lost in admiration, whether it searches into particular truths or contemplates the divine glories in their entirety.

Twentiethly: Usually great delight is enjoyed in this complete loving union; but it may be otherwise with those whom God desires to try very greatly. In this case the understanding may have great light about the justice of God, his infinite sanctity, and the nothingness of creatures; and at the same time with a very intense but unfelt love may be joined a feeling of a crushing abasement and of annihilation before God. This union is then without sweetness, but not without fruit.

Twenty-firstly: To these graces, which do not belong to the order of faith, may be added extraordinary favours, such as revelations, visions, and alienation of the senses. In the latter case the effects already indicated are much more completely obtained; the powers are more than mastered; they are suspended, with the exception of the will, which loves with a most intense and pure love.

7. The loving union and contemplation.

21. In order not to confuse this subject, I have avoided making use of the word "contemplation," because all authors are not agreed as to its meaning;[1] but we so often find it in spiritual works that an explanation of it is necessary. All are agreed in making contemplation consist in an attention to God and to heavenly things during a certain time, which produces love. Also all are agreed that contemplation must not be confounded with meditation, which is exercised by reasoning and trying to discover and to fathom the truth, while contemplation already possesses the truth, and pauses to dwell upon it with admiration and delight.

But what connection has it with the mystical phenomena that we have described? Is it to be confounded with the union of love? In other words, is the union of love an essential part of contemplation and sufficient for it?

22. Firstly, is this loving mystical union essential to contemplation?

In order to have contemplation, we have said that the attention of the soul is riveted on God and divine things during a certain space of time. But cannot one, without the special graces of the loving union, and only by reflections and reasonings, understand so far the divine perfections as to remain in admiration before them?

Theoretically this does not seem impossible. Sometimes it happens that those who possess quick and penetrating minds feel much wonder and admiration when, as philosophers or theologians, they study the attributes of God. Could not their admiration, if prolonged, become contemplation? Practically this is extremely rare, even in very learned men, unless they are favoured with greater light. Without doubt, at first they are struck with the divine grandeur, but when this light is withdrawn they become tired of the same considerations.

Ancient authors are of opinion that the consideration of the perfections of God is chiefly suitable to the perfect. These, in fact, are never tired of it, for the light they enjoy and their fervent love enable them to take pleasure in it. The imperfect are much less attracted, and quickly return to other thoughts better adapted to them. That which is infinite bewilders them, and in endeavouring to rise to this height they quickly lose their balance and

[1] It is impossible to explain their doctrine on perfection without showing that which they teach on contemplation, so close, according to them, is the connection between perfection and contemplation.

instinctively turn to subjects within their grasp. It must therefore be concluded that the union of love is a state indispensable to contemplation.

This is also the teaching of the masters. When they speak of contemplation—the reader can judge by the passages relating to this subject which we shall quote—they do not imply a state which has been attained only by personal effort and reasoning, but one in which such strong light and burning love have been infused that it is impossible not to recognize that these eminent graces are an especial work of the Spirit of God.

23. Does this mean that all reasoning ought to be banished from the contemplative state?

Why should reasoning be completely banished? Reflections are no longer used during the contemplative act. All is simply beheld. However, this is not a state of long continuance, nor does it last during the whole time of prayer, so that, both before and after, reflections may be useful. It is true that generally the acts that occur during contemplative prayer are simply memories and not reasonings. Lofty and great truths are recalled to mind, truths that have already formed subjects of contemplation, and, the fire of divine love being rapidly enkindled, holy thoughts are excited and dwelt upon with pleasure. In this case personal efforts have not acquired contemplation, but simply a state has been entered which renders the communication of divine light more easy. The attention is fixed on God, the way of the Lord has been prepared, the co-operation required by him has been given, and the desired favour has been received. It sometimes happens that the mind united to God in a confused manner in the higher faculties is at the same time occupied with other considerations in the lower. By the effort to consider the attributes of God, painful struggles are avoided and an entire surrender to the holy exercise of contemplation takes place.

In all cases the activity of the reason plays only a secondary part, contemplation remaining a gift of God to which loving union, produced directly by God, is essential.

24. Secondly, does contemplation exist from the beginning of this loving union?

On this point opinions are divided. The states indicated in the twenty-first proposition—ecstasies, raptures, etc.—belong to extraordinary contemplation, as spiritual authors are unanimously agreed. Also, if the loving union is complete and all the faculties participate it cannot be disputed that this is a state of contemplation. But

many authors, in speaking of contemplation, confine themselves to that alone; they seem to ignore the state that we have named the sensible loving union and that which is dry, wherein the contemplative element is more hidden. It seems to them that a state in which distractions are possible and in which the soul makes use of reasonings to turn the understanding entirely to God does not deserve the name of contemplation.

Nevertheless, even in the midst of these distractions the soul is not separated from God, but preserves an indistinct consciousness of the divine presence. There is an incessant tendency towards the Beloved, whether the sweetness of union is enjoyed sensibly or whether, the love being less sensibly felt, this tendency is only made known by the desire for God and a distaste for all things else.

This is the usual beginning of the contemplative life, and it appears again later, more or less frequently. St John of the Cross has explained this state very lucidly, and has not hesitated to call this secret union of love contemplation. In these days of ours authors have more and more frequently followed his example and widened the meaning of the word, and they are right, for this love persisting in the highest part of the soul supposes a knowledge equally permanent, and this knowledge, not being the result of reasoning, consists in a look by which God is beheld, so to speak, continually. It must therefore be admitted with the holy author that contemplation is identical with the union of love. It is well to remark, however, that among the number of the masters many designate by the name of contemplation only the complete and sensibly felt union of love, and very few include the dry union so well analyzed by St John of the Cross.

For want of remarking this, authors who only contradict each other in appearance are sometimes set up in opposition. Those who understand by contemplation all mystical union, even when dry, will say that it is more frequent than will those who by contemplation understand only a complete union of every faculty. The first admit willingly that contemplation is, as a rule, the prayer of the perfect; the second are inclined to deny this. Occasionally one discovers in the same author contradictions and hesitations, to be explained in the same way; sometimes, considering the necessity of mystical graces for attaining perfection, they affirm that God does not refuse contemplation to faithful souls; and sometimes, considering the joys and sweetness that often accompany this state, they declare that even these do not obtain it.

25. Many authors of the last centuries have adopted a different division of contemplative prayer; they distinguish infused or passive contemplation from that which is acquired or active; but, as no trace of such a distinction can be found in the writings of the masters of mystical prayer, there is no necessity to speak of it here.

8. *The authority of spiritual writers.*

26. Such is, on this important question of the state of perfection, the teaching which appears to be traditional, and which it will be easy to establish by the teaching of the masters. But who are those who are designated by this word "masters"? For, although the writers who have treated of these matters are numerous, their authority is very different.

Among all the writers on these great questions of spirituality, those who combine sanctity with learning are the first to be attended to. They alone deserve the name of masters. They alone possess what nothing else can supply—personal experience; and with this experimental knowledge of the states they describe is joined their knowledge of many other souls led by similar paths; in fine, they have received great light from God, and seem to have been raised up by him and impelled by the Holy Spirit to write their works to enlighten the faithful as to the true doctrine.

However great may be the theological science of a spiritual author, yet when he treats of a subject of which he has no personal knowledge his doctrine should approach as closely as possible to the authority from whence he draws it, and should be carefully controlled. This is especially the case if the author has had no intimate and continuous intercourse with those who have attained a high degree of the spiritual life. I know a contemporary author who, desiring to treat of matters of high spirituality, had several contemplatives introduced to him, and held some conversations with them. It was a good idea, and by no means to be despised; nevertheless, a few rapid conversations with persons with whom one has no intimate acquaintance are insufficient. But yet it is a step in advance, for, as this author has himself remarked, there are many writers in these last centuries who seem by no means anxious to find out if their theories are verified by facts.

The state of perfection, the unitive way, is not an unheard-of thing in the Church; it is the usual crowning-

point of the spiritual life. There are states called by theologians states of acquired perfection, and those who have entered these states should possess perfection; but there are other states wherein is an obligation of striving after perfection without intermission, evidently with the hope of attaining it some day. Many, it is true, do not obey the call of God, and remain on the road; but the perfect, of whom there are too few, are, nevertheless, sufficiently numerous for anyone to ascertain from their experience the teaching of the masters. It is therefore wise to look somewhat askance at those writers who neglect the lessons of experience. Besides, they often draw the mass of their doctrine from second-hand authorities, trying afterwards, from some extracts from the great masters, to confirm their statements. I have considered it necessary to follow a different course, to choose the guides with scrupulous care, and to follow their lead as closely as possible. To take a short passage from one work and disconnect it from the context is a very unfair proceeding by which one exposes oneself to attribute ideas to an author that are not his own, and to wander far from the true doctrine.

9. *Are all called to perfection and the life of union?*

26 *a*.[1] To elucidate this question it is first necessary to specify precisely what is meant by perfection, because, being necessarily relative as applied to creatures, it can be taken in different senses. If one grieves for one's faults because they offend an infinitely good God, *even if one only grieved for having committed mortal sins*, this contrition would be called perfect, because the motive is perfect, compared to that of attrition. The word "perfect" does not, in this case, designate a high degree of virtue. Compared with the Mosaic Law, the new law, even considering only the precepts and excluding the evangelical counsels, is a perfect law; and so, after having declared that he abolished the law of retaliation, polygamy, and divorce, which was tolerated by Moses, our Saviour concludes: *Estote ergo perfecti:* Be ye therefore perfect. Even this perfection is only relative. While counselling a young man who had observed all the commandments to leave all things and follow him, our Saviour set before him a higher perfection to which not everyone is called, as the words of our Saviour prove: *Si vis perfectus esse:*

[1] I have not wished to change the numbering of the first edition, so for the added passages the numbers are repeated.

If thou wilt be perfect. Perfection, as described by theologians in connection with the unitive way, supposes a degree of virtue to which only a few are called, and at which the greater number of human beings cannot arrive. Thus children, and uneducated and uninstructed Christians, and the unbalanced cannot attain these heights of virtue, putting aside idiots, imbeciles, and infidels as out of the question. It is also the case with many good people, to whom no one would dream of preaching the complete abnegation necessary to perfection. God calls each to the perfection of his state; thus he does not call a child of seven to the perfection required of a priest or a religious. He wills this perfection, moreover, not absolutely, but conditionally. In this way do the theologians reason about the will of God to save all men, even infants who die before birth; he does not will their salvation absolutely, but conditionally; that is, on condition that the freewill of men, the order of nature, and all moral and physical causes are not in opposition to the divine will.

The great majority of men do not receive the mystical graces of light and love that are necessary for the life of union with God, either because God does not call them to such a high degree of virtue or because there are too many obstacles in the way, some arising from their own infidelity to grace, and some from other causes. Among these may be reckoned an erroneous or incomplete spiritual teaching, and this is the opinion of the saints, confirmed by experience.[1] How many priests or religious have failed to arrive at that state of perfection to which God has called them, either because their training has been inadequate or else because they have not understood in what the unitive life consists and how to attain it!

[1] I have quoted elsewhere (*Degrees*, Bk. V, Pt. III, ch. i) the justly severe words of St Teresa, St John of the Cross, and St Jane Chantal.

CHAPTER II

THE TEACHING OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: THE GREEK FATHERS

1. *Clement of Alexandria.*

27. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA[1] is one of the most ancient of the Fathers whose works we possess. His authority is very great, not only on account of his eminent piety, learning, and talent, but also because in his *Stromata*[2] he professes to reproduce the traditional doctrine which he had received from the disciples of the Apostles.

28. At different times Clement distinguishes in his writings three degrees in the spiritual life: "The first degree, to raise oneself above the carnal man, is precept joined to fear, which causes one to abstain from injustice; the second is that of hope, which makes one desire the sovereign good; and charity completes the work, because it gives perfect knowledge" (*Stromata*, ii, 6, 9; iv, 7). "He who ceases to be a son of unbelief must pass from darkness to light, and, lending an ear to the teaching of wisdom, become first a loyal servitor (δοῦλον, slave) of the Lord, and then a faithful servant (θεράποντα, mercenary). Whoever advances further in virtue will be accounted amongst the children"[3] (*Strom.*, i, 27).

29. Clement names those who have arrived at the third degree "gnostics," and by this word he designates the man who is learned in supernatural knowledge, the man who is wise and enlightened by God. For what reason does he thus designate the perfect Christian? He explains it himself: "There are two powers in the soul: knowledge and love. Knowledge always precedes action, and

[1] Clement of Alexandria lived in the second century. "In placing his first appearance at the school of Alexandria in the year 190 or thereabout, there is no risk of going far from the truth" (Mgr. Freppel, *Clement of Alexandria*, third lesson).

[2] Translation by Mgr. Freppel, *Clement of Alexandria*, eighteenth lesson.

[3] This passage and several others to be found in this second edition have been added to the text by the learned Benedictine who has translated this work into German. I here express my gratitude to him for this and for some very true remarks inserted in his work, which have enabled me to make some useful corrections.

is, therefore, the principle and cause of all action; it is then from the kind of knowledge possessed by the reasonable soul that its qualities can be deduced" (*Strom.*, vi, 8). It may not always be true that the worth of a soul can be calculated by the light it possesses, but, generally, the light possessed by a soul increases in proportion to the virtue acquired; this is an indisputable fact, and this, it appears, is what Clement of Alexandria would have us understand. This is why he identifies true knowledge (γνῶσις) with perfection, and to this knowledge he gives the name of "contemplation, which, when perfect, embraces all by a single glance" (*Strom.*, vi, 8). This perfect knowledge, he remarks elsewhere, is the greatest good of all, and cannot be too much desired, with all the good things it procures (*Strom.*, vi, 12).

30. How can this perfect knowledge be obtained? By stripping oneself of all that is of the senses to rise to the region of pure intellect. For this one must conquer sensual passions, succeed in renouncing all imaginations and everything proceeding from the senses, and form an idea of the divinity that, although negative, is very true, because ascribing to him all perfection, and denying of him all the imperfections to which creatures are subject.

"To be detached from self and from all one's inclinations is a sacrifice well-pleasing to God, and is truly divine worship. Whoever dismisses from his thoughts all visible imagery and everything in which the senses take part, to allow only the simple intellect to act, is pursuing the path of true philosophy. It was for this reason that Pythagoras imposed on his disciples a silence of five years, during which they were to break away from sensible objects and to comptemplate God with the naked understanding.

"These principles, which the most illustrious Greeks borrowed from Moses, had been expounded by them in their philosophical works. Moses prescribed that the victims, offered in holocaust, should first be flayed, and then that the members should be cut in pieces, because the soul of the gnostic should first be stripped of material covering—that is to say, freed from the vanities of the senses, from all the defects to which vain or erroneous ideas give rise, and from sensual passions; *then it will receive the light which will sanctify.*

"The generality of men, on the contrary, encase themselves like snails in a heavy, impervious covering, or, like hedgehogs, roll themselves up, and, concentrating themselves on their passions, form the same ideas of the all-holy and immutable God as they have of themselves.

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They do not observe that God has endowed us with a number of natural qualities which do not apply to himself, such as the necessity of taking food and of growing.

31. "It is, therefore, not without ground that among the Greeks the mysteries began with ablutions, as among the barbarians with the bath. After that came the initial mysteries which had to be taught as a preparation for those that were to follow. Then came the great mysteries, after which there was nothing further to learn, but only to contemplate, to discern with the eye of the understanding, things as they are in themselves, and their nature.[1]

"For us Christians, confession is our purification, and contemplation is reached through analysis. By analysis we arrive at the first intelligence by beginning from beings which are subject thereto, and by stripping bodies of their natural properties. Thus we take away the three dimensions—height, breadth, and length. What remains after this is a point, or, in other words, a monad occupying a certain place. By doing away with this place you have the monad alone. If then, discarding the inherent properties of bodies, and those by which incorporeal things are distinguished, we precipitate ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and, *by the power of sanctity*, raise ourselves to behold his immensity, we shall in some degree arrive at the knowledge of the Almighty, less, however, at the understanding of what he is than of what he is not"[2] (*Strom.*, v, 11).

32. Nevertheless, it must not be thought that the method indicated by our author is sufficient, in his view, to obtain perfect knowledge. It only facilitates the work of grace, and it is necessary that God himself should enlighten his servant.

"The first cause," says Clement, "is not shut up in one place, but is above all places, above time, above language, and beyond the understanding. For this reason Moses said to God, *Show thyself to me*, implying that what God is can neither be taught nor explained in human language, and that we can only understand what he imparts. The more we study his perfections, the more obscure they appear, and the more blind we seem. *The true knowledge of God is a grace which he bestows through the merits of his Son.* For this reason it is said in Holy Scripture: Abraham went forward towards the place that the Lord had shown him, and the third day,

[1] It can easily be perceived that this passage indicates the celebrated division of the three states: the purgative, illuminative, and unitive or contemplative.

[2] Mgr. Freppel, *Clement of Alexandria*, fifteenth lesson.

lifting up his eyes, he saw the place from afar. The first day means the light which the soul receives at the sight of creatures, whose beauty reflects that of their Creator; the second day indicates the holy desires of the fervent soul; on the third day the eyes of the soul are at last opened by him who rose on the third day, to see plainly the things of the spirit" (*Strom.*, v, 11).

33. We see, then, that Clement here again points out the three degrees of the spiritual life; it is only to the third degree that perfect knowledge is accorded. This light, which is so illuminating, whether sought, or given by God unasked, is, according to our author, the recompense of a pure life, and the gift of God. "Whether it be that the Father attracts to himself him who has lived holily, and who has attained to the knowledge of the infinitely happy and eternal Being, or that he himself, making use of liberty, breaks through the barriers to get at the knowledge of the sovereign good, it is always by the help of an unusual and signal grace that he receives, so to say, wings, and is raised above the heights, having laid aside that which by its weight made him cleave to the earth"[1] (*Strom.*, v, 12).

34. It is not only in a rare and transient way that God grants this precious light to the perfect. "Gnosis," says Clement, "comes by its exercise, by a habit of perpetual and steadfast contemplation." Nevertheless, he will not assert that the perfect remain in a state of perfect contemplation. As Mgr. Freppel well explains, the author of the *Stromata*, "in attributing to the gnostic a state of permanent contemplation, simply means that by practice the force of the habit becomes second nature," and indicates how frequent and easy great thoughts become, and how nearly at every instant union with God is effected by prayer.

"The entire life of the gnostic is a long feast-day. His daily sacrifices are themselves prayers; the praises of God repeated by him, the Holy Scriptures read by him before his meals, the psalms and hymns which he chants either at table or before sleeping, and, lastly, his night prayers. Thanks to these practices, he unites with the heavenly choir, and by his constant recollection devotes himself to unfailing contemplation. But does he not make other sacrifices also? Does he not give to the poor the alms of the spiritual and temporal goods possessed by

[1] *Corpus enim quod corrumpitur aggravat animam et terrena habitatio deprimit sensum nulla cogitantem* (Wisd. ix, 15).

him? Certainly he does, and abundantly. As to vocal prayer, he abstains from all wordy discourse, having been taught by God to desire only the absolute good. Therefore, he prays everywhere, but not for the purpose of attracting the attention of others. Walking, conversing, reposing, reading; all reasonable works are all different forms of prayer" (*Strom.*, vii, 7). This, then, is the constant prayer recommended by our divine Master: *Oportet semper orare et nunquam deficere.* "The perfect Christian," continues Clement, "far from confining himself to isolated acts, honours God during his whole life in every place, and in no matter what circumstance."[1]

35. The gnostic of Clement of Alexandria not only enjoys great light, but possesses a love equal to his knowledge, for this continual and intimate intercourse with God supposes also an ardent love. It is love, also, which inspires him with the desire to become like unto his Beloved. "At what does the man who loves God above all things aim?" asks Mgr. Freppel, explaining the doctrine of our author.[2] "At resembling him, at being united to him, at being one with him as much as possible; for, says Clement of Alexandria, the property of love is, that those who love desire to resemble each other, so that at length there becomes established between them a perfect community of thought, feeling, and affection" (*Strom.*, ii, 9).

"To realize that he knows nothing is the first step in knowledge for him who walks according to the mind of the Word. This ignorant man seeks, and in seeking finds his Master; having found him, he believes, and believing, he hopes; hope leads him on to love, and in endeavouring to resemble his Beloved, he becomes like unto him" (*Strom.*, iv, 3). "The soul of the just man," says Clement elsewhere (*Strom.*, vii, 3), "is the true likeness and image of God. In him is established and dwells, when he is amenable to the divine laws, the King of men and of angels, the eternal Word. It is indeed the only Son of God, that image of the glory of the almighty Lord and Father, who imparts to the soul of the gnostic perfect contemplation in order to render him as it were a third divine image, which, as far as possible, is likened to the second cause, to that real life by which we live a life indeed."

36. Rendered like unto God by the precious gift of contemplation, the gnostic has yet another kind of

[1] Mgr. Freppel, *Clement of Alexandria*, nineteenth lesson.
[2] *Ibid.*, eighteenth lesson.

resemblance to him. Perfectly indifferent[1] to earthly things, he preserves in all circumstances a holy peace. "He who has, by charity, already invested the goods that will one day be his, as having, by hope, anticipated his inheritance, can desire nothing, since he possesses, as far as possible, everything that he could desire. One need not be surprised if from this time perfect love can be maintained in an inviolable immutability. Carried towards God on the wings of love, the gnostic withdraws his soul from the influence of passion, and lives in perfect freedom on the ruins of his lusts. As regards the body, he makes no more use of it than to allow it necessary things, so that it may not die" (*Strom.*, vi, 9).

"He who, by this indifference, has, as it were, become divinized, and has kept free from all defilement, remains always the same. Like sailors who, after casting the anchor, draw their vessel towards it, instead of drawing it towards them, so the true gnostic, in endeavouring to attract God by a perfect life, is impelling himself, without knowing it, towards God. In the contemplative life, he who is serving God does not neglect himself; when he has become perfectly purified he contemplates, as a saint, the God of all sanctity . . . and renders himself as much as possible like unto God" (*Strom.*, iv, 23).

37. Therefore, according to Clement of Alexandria, there are, in the spiritual life, three degrees; in the third degree, that of perfection, the soul receives great light from God, and rising above all that is sensible, even above the highest created beings, attains to God, whose incomprehensible grandeur enchants it. This higher knowledge of divine things detaches it from creatures, and at the same time frees it from the torment of the passions. Possessed of the love of God, it is, as regards all else, in a state of holy indifference; its life is, as much as possible, a continual contemplation, which does not in the least prevent it attending to necessary business; it is a close union, an intimate and habitual intercourse with God. The contemplative thus becomes a faithful image of the divinity, both on account of his perfectly submissive conduct towards God, and of his constant application to divine things; he resembles his

[1] Clement makes use of the famous word ἀπάθεια (apathy, insensibility). He has been blamed for having exaggerated this insensibility. True it is that this author is not as accurate in his expressions as, later, was St Francis de Sales in treating of holy indifference, the terms made use of by him not being always weighed; but in considering the whole of his teaching, it can be seen that he has at heart the desire to give the true doctrine (see Mgr. Freppel, nineteenth lesson).

heavenly model, the Word made flesh, Himself the image of the infinitely holy God. Have we not here the seed of all mystical science? Doubtless it is only the seed, but it is truly remarkable that in such ancient times can be found all the elements of a doctrine which succeeding centuries have but defined and developed without changing any essential point.

38. This doctrine, in the main so beautiful and true, was not originated by Clement. He quite plainly affirms in the work from which we have taken it—the *Stromata*—that it is but the echo of tradition. "This Book," he says, "has not been composed to make a display of vain science; it is the result of things remembered and accumulated for my old age, a remedy for forgetfulness; it is a simple reproduction and reflection of the words of holy persons whom I have been accounted worthy to hear. Like sons receiving the paternal inheritance, these men carefully preserved the true tradition of sacred learning, just as it was received from James and Peter, John and Paul. By an effect of the divine goodness they lived to our day to hand on to us the doctrine of the Apostles as our rightful inheritance"[1] (*Strom.*, i, 50). The testimony of Clement of Alexandria was valuable to collate because this author in his *Stromata* wrote much on the subject about which we are occupied. The other Fathers give us only isolated passages. He, however, explains the matter at some length, and in comparing his different explanations it is easy to grasp his entire doctrine. It then becomes easy to discover this same doctrine in later writings.

2. *Origen.*

39. Some remarks in the writings of Origen—and it would not be difficult to find many more—show that he had the same opinions as his master on the subject of contemplation.[2] Origen recognized two kinds of life in the Church, the active and the contemplative; and the latter he ranks first. "Contemplatives," he says, "are in the house of God, while those who lead an active life are only in the vestibule" (*In Psalm.* cxxxiii).

[1] *Cf.* Mgr. Freppel, *Clement of Alexandria,* third and thirteenth lessons.

[2] M. Martinez, a great student of Origen, testifies that this illustrious doctor never tires of repeating the value of contemplation and of encouraging faithful souls to aim at the contemplative state, which he shows to be the summit of the spiritual life (*Ascétisme chrétien,* Paris, Beauchesne, 1913).

Contemplation, which he also places in the third degree of the spiritual life, exacts, according to him, a great purity of heart, perfect detachment, and is the effect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

"God, having no body, is invisible; yet contemplatives can behold him with the eyes of the soul—that is to say, contemplate him spiritually; but for this it is necessary to have a pure heart, as it is not reasonable to suppose that a corrupt soul can contemplate him who is purity itself" (*Contra Celsum*, vi, 19). "He who, having passed the first degree, wherein the correction of bad habits and the fulfilment of the commandments is enjoined, and having thus obtained a knowledge of the vanity of the world and the nothingness of perishable things, shall have renounced the world and all its goods, will attain contemplation and a desire for things invisible and eternal. To arrive at this degree one must, by a grace of divine mercy, contemplate the beauty of the Word of God, and burn with love for him" (*In Cant.* Prolog.). "Arise, my love, my dove, my beautiful one. Let us see what this word of God to the soul worthy of his love signifies. He first shows himself as if through a window (*respiciens per fenestras*), revealing himself by means of the senses—that is, by the sight in reading, by the hearing in instruction; he has made the soul see how great he is. Now he invites it to come out—that is to say, to free itself from the senses, to live no more according to the flesh, and to hear the words, *You are not in the flesh, but in the spirit* (Rom. viii, 9). The Word, indeed, would not call the soul 'my love' unless he had united it to himself in such a manner as to make it one spirit with himself; he would not call it 'my beautiful one' if he did not see in it his own image renewed day after day; nor if he did not see that it was filled with the Holy Spirit, who had appeared in the form of a dove, would he have called it 'my dove.' This soul is, indeed, captivated with the love of the Word of God; it burns with the desire of flying to him. 'Who will give me the wings of a dove, that I may fly away and rest in thee?' it cries. I will take flight by means of the senses, then by more spiritual means, and when I have gained the treasures of knowledge and of wisdom I will repose. It seems to me, indeed, that those who receive the virtue of the Holy Spirit are sanctified by him and filled with his gifts, and since he has shown himself under the form of a dove, they, also, become like doves; rising on the wings of the divine Spirit, they take their flight far above earthly things towards those that are heavenly"

(*In Cantic.*, lib. iv). "There is no true contemplative[1] but he who has attained the perfection of the active life, who knows how to withdraw his senses from exterior things in order to rise above the phantoms of the imagination, and the reasonings of the understanding. He will thus penetrate the divine truths with an enlightened faith, and, concentrating his intellect and his will on the sovereign good, will find therein the utmost delight and also strength to overcome all weaknesses."

3. *St Athanasius.*

40. In the following century St Athanasius, another great doctor of this same Church of Alexandria, spoke to the same effect.

"In creating man to his own image, God has given him power to know and contemplate the nature of created beings. He has given him the idea and thought of his eternal Being, for he would have man retain always the divine resemblance, and keep his mind ever on the thought of God, so that, faithful to the grace received and to the gift bestowed on him by the Word, he should remain in familiar friendship with God and lead a life of security and happiness. If a purified soul should reject all that could prevent the knowledge of God, it would incessantly contemplate the substantial figure of the Father, the divine Word, the model of whom it is the image, and be struck with admiration of the wisdom with which he governs the world. In this way it would be raised above material and sensible things to attain to those which are heavenly and divine, and only to be apprehended by the understanding. Then the human soul, separating itself from all that is material, has no longer any desire for things of the senses, but in interior solitude soars on high as before the fall, and, rising above all that excites the senses, above all that is human, mounts to a sublime region, and with eyes fixed on the Word, in the Son of God it discerns the Father. This contemplation is full of charm, and revives the desire for and the love of God. With this soul it is as with the first man, who, according to the Scripture, was united to God with a holy liberty and great confidence, contemplating heavenly things. . . .

[1] This quotation is taken from a work of the Middle Ages, for a long time attributed to St Bonaventure, but really by Rudolph of Biberach, a German Franciscan of the fourteenth century: *De 7 itineribus æternitatis. De 3 itinere, dist.* iv. Can this last passage really be from Origen? I dare not assert it, yet it is assuredly very ancient, and bears witness to the doctrine of antiquity.

It is purity of the soul that renders it capable of fixing its gaze on God, according to the words of our Lord, *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God* (*Oratio contra Gentes*, initio). There is ever the same praise of contemplation and the same agreement that, to obtain this divine gift, it is necessary to purify the soul, to stifle its lusts, to rise above sensible images and to attend only to God."

4. *St Macarius.*

40 *a*. It would be well to know what was the teaching of the Fathers of the Desert at the time when the great Bishop of Alexandria lived. There dwelt at Scete, not far from Alexandria, the illustrious St Macarius, who had under his guidance a great number of monks. In the letter addressed to his followers (*vide* the article by Dom Wilmart in the *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, January, 1920), this great saint describes the soul's progress towards perfection. At first, a man reflects on the end for which he was created,[1] and applies himself to gain a knowledge of his Creator. Then he repents of his sins; God inspires him with a lively contrition, and urges him to atone for his sins by fasts, watchings, constant prayer, and patience, under injurious treatment. Then temptations to sensuality and pride assail him, which, should he courageously withstand them, render him more dear to God. If afterwards he resist impure temptations and gain a victory over them, they make him feel more forcibly his own weakness, and show him that virtue is beyond the powers of nature, and that he needs to be fortified by the good and most merciful Lord who gives him the most delightful consolations and a sweet hope of gaining the victory. But when God finds that he is growing firmer he withdraws his consolations and allows the enemy to assault him more rudely. After a long struggle, during which God seems to have withdrawn his support, and when the man appears on the point of shipwreck, God, who loves men, imparts to him a great strength, and renders his soul and body subject to the yoke of the Holy Spirit, the great consoler. At the same time he enlightens him and makes him understand that it is from him that his soul obtains strength. After these trials the Holy Spirit grants him great light better to understand the reward in store for saints, and the torments that await sinners. Thereafter the Holy Spirit raises him above all things created. He bestows on him a sound judgement, places a watch about his lips, and

[1] St Ignatius also begins his *Exercises* by this reflection.

enables him always to walk in the right path; to keep up a continual prayer in his heart, and to be faithful in mortifying the flesh. The Holy Spirit enables him to practise all these virtues discreetly with an undisturbed heart and great peace. Man, then, understands how sweet it is to be continually united to God.

This letter of St Macarius the Great is regarded by the learned as authentic, and was early translated from Greek into Latin and Syriac. For a long time, also, fifty homilies were attributed to this holy priest, but this statement recent studies have proved to be incorrect, because they contain many very strange passages also to be found in the books of the Messalians or Euchites. It is, however, certain that, such passages apart, the author of these homilies teaches a very true and beautiful doctrine, quite at variance with that of these heretics whose gross errors resemble those of Molinos. Could the passages alluded to have been added to his works by heretics? This appears to be a probable assumption. Dom Wilmart (*Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, 1920, pp. 361-377) recognizes the writer as a remarkably sound and gifted person, who habitually treats of the things of God with great dignity. He thinks, however, that he was a Messalian, but remarks in conclusion, "One goes on reading *Macarius* without a doubt of his sincerity, one can also still profit by his counsels and mystical experiences." Whoever this author is, he is an interesting witness to the mysticism of the fourth century, and in virtue of this fact ought to have his place here.

41. When he explains what perfect souls are, we see that he regards perfection as a gift of God; it is nothing else but the fire of divine charity with which the Holy Spirit inflames those who show a holy eagerness for it, and remove every obstacle that might obstruct it. Wounded by divine love, they soon become detached from all things, and can repose in the delights of an ardent and ineffable charity. "As metals thrown into the fire lose their natural hardness, and become softer the longer they remain in the fire, he who renounces the world receives the divine fire of charity from the Holy Spirit, which enables him to persevere in faith and hope, and cleaving only to God, to give himself up, at the cost of many pains and fatigues, to the pursuit of the Supreme Being. Then he loses all love of the world, and is delivered from all wrong affections. Regarding all things as either vain or superfluous, he severs himself from them, and no longer exhibits that hardness of heart that is produced by

sin. The heavenly Spouse then gives himself to him, and he rests in a love all ardour and delight."

There is no reason to wonder that divine love detaches the soul from the vanities of the world. "If earthly love makes one leave father, mother, and brethren so that they become to some extent strangers, all affection being centred on husband or wife, . . . how much more would those souls to whom the Holy Spirit has truly communicated himself become free from earthly affections? Those who are filled with heavenly desires could not help looking upon the things of this world as superfluities when united to him who has descended from heaven to dwell in them.

"Courage, then, beloved brothers, since gifts so precious are offered to us and such magnificent promises have been made to us; let us thrust aside all obstacles, reject all love of the world, and only seek after and covet the true Good. Then will the Holy Spirit communicate to us that ineffable charity which St Paul urges us to practise—*sectamini charitatem*. Then may the hardness of our hearts be softened by the action of God, so that, wounded by divine love, we may obtain sweetness and peace of mind" (*Homily IV*, Nos. 14, 15, 16).

42. In his eighth *Homily* he describes contemplation, and shows it in all its perfection, but always explains carefully that there are different degrees in it.

"It happens to those addicted to prayer to be at once filled with divine grace; their hearts enjoying God are thrilled with joy, even as the wife is thrilled in the presence of her husband. . . . Thus the faithful soul, who may have spent the day transacting business, when consecrating an hour to prayer, feels himself impressed interiorly with the thought of eternity. He becomes filled with great sweetness, in such wise as his mind is as though suspended and transported to another world. In this blessed hour the cares and preoccupations of this life are buried in profound oblivion, the soul being entirely filled and taken captive by the thought of divine and heavenly things, of that which is infinite and incomprehensible, and of marvels it would be impossible to explain. So vivid will these feelings be that the soul will desire to break all bonds and to die while praying.

43. "Question: Is the soul always in this state?

"Answer: In the faithful soul grace always dwells; it has been, as it were, rooted there from infancy and forms part of its being; and the soul is always free to make use of it. But, as fire sometimes burns with great power and sometimes, on the contrary, falls and consumes the fuel slowly,

just as a light will sometimes give out a bright blaze, at another time only a pale and faint glimmer, so the light of grace is sometimes very brilliant and the soul is then as if intoxicated with divine love, and then again it is less intense and gives but a feeble light.

"Therefore sometimes the faithful Christian receives an intense interior light, profound and hidden, and consequently, becoming as though plunged into joyful contemplation, he loses mastery over himself, and seems to those about him as if he were out of his senses. In this way, and on account of his burning charity, of the delights which intoxicate him, and the secret mysteries which are unveiled before him, he reaches the height of perfection and of love. But afterwards this grace is withdrawn, and the enemies of his soul spread a thick veil over it, but, all the same, it has not entirely disappeared; it can be perceived, although the soul remains in a lower state of perfection and charity."

44. Elsewhere (*Homily XVIII*, Nos. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) he again draws a beautiful picture of the contemplative states, and exhorts his readers to pray for them with confidence. "Those who have merited to become the true children of God, and to be born again of the Holy Spirit, those who possess within them the Christ who enlightens and consoles them, receive favours from the Spirit of God and different kinds of operation, so that grace acts invisibly in their hearts without disturbing their peace. Sometimes, like guests at a royal feast, they are in a state of inexpressible gladness; sometimes they enjoy divine and intimate delights resembling those of a bride in the presence of her bridegroom . . . and anon the divine communications throw them into a state of holy inebriety. Occasionally a lively compassion at the sight of human miseries takes possession of them, and in the fervour of their charity their tears gush forth and they pray with great fervour, imploring the divine mercy for the whole human race. . . .

"At other times, in the depths of their humility, they place themselves beneath all humanity, regarding themselves as the most unworthy of all."

"As a valiant soldier arms himself to do battle in the service of his king, so the spiritual man in the armour of the Holy Spirit will attack the enemies of his soul and trample them under foot. At other times, on the contrary, he keeps a profound peace, tasting an indescribable delight.

"Or the Holy Spirit enlightens his understanding and

communicates to it an unspeakable wisdom, and a knowledge of high things that human language is powerless to explain; and there are times when there is nothing to distinguish him from the rest of men. In this way divine grace makes the faithful pass through numerous vicissitudes, either consoling them or exercising them according to the designs of divine Providence, in order to render them pure and perfect in the eyes of their heavenly Father.

45. "These operations of the Holy Spirit suppose withal the highest degree of virtue, not far removed from perfection (and, without doubt, also, sanctity . . .). When man has attained perfection, then, set free from natural affections he becomes united to the Spirit of God by a secret bond so intimate that he is, as it were, one spirit with him, and becomes all light, vision, joy, delectation, ecstasy, charity, tenderness, goodness, and mercy. As a stone on the bed of the ocean is surrounded by the water, so these holy souls are imbued with the Spirit of God and become like unto Christ, possessing in themselves the power and the virtue of the Holy Spirit. They live pure and spotless lives, dwelling in recollection within themselves.

46. "We also pray to God with a lively confidence, not doubting that he will grant us the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that this divine Spirit may govern us, render us in all things docile to the will of God, grant us peace and consolation, and that thus, revived and urged on by grace, we may merit, according to St Paul, 'to be filled with all the plenitude of God' (Eph. iii, 19), and may become perfect and established in the full possession of the life of Jesus Christ.

"Has not our Lord promised that all who believed in him and who prayed to him with sincerity would receive the ineffable gift of union with the Holy Spirit? Therefore let us give ourselves entirely to our Lord, and thus hasten by our desires the reception of so great a good, in order that, having devoted ourselves body and soul to God, and attached ourselves to the cross of Christ, we may become worthy of the eternal kingdom, and give glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost for ever and ever."

46 *a*. In the Greek Patrology are added to the Homilies some short treatises which were for long attributed to this holy abbot, but which, it appears, are the work of a much later author; yet they are certainly inspired by the doctrine of the author of the *Homilies*, of which they occasionally

reproduce the very words. The author of these treatises presents to his readers, as the end to which they ought to attain, a state in which they will be quite close to God, or, better still, in which God dwells and acts in them, in which the Holy Spirit produces within them the fruits of virtue, and accords to them the gift of perfect prayer; he promises that God will grant them grace to be raised to a state of perfect union, and to be transformed into himself, if, by a generous practice of virtue and by complete renunciation, they dispose themselves to receive it.

In the treatise, *Of Elevation of Mind*, Περὶ ὑψώσεως του νοός (*P.G.*, t. xxxiv, col. 893, vi, vii), he writes: "In the same way as the soul is in the body and in all its members, so does the ineffable and incomprehensible goodness of Christ enter into the faithful who are his friends, and he becomes one spirit with them, according to the saying of St Paul (1 Cor. iv, 17), and in this way they live in God. To these the Lord, whenever he wills, becomes a fire which consumes in them all that is evil, according to the prophet, 'Our God is a consuming fire' (Deut. iv, 24; Heb. xii, 29). At other times he is to them an indescribable repose, and again at others joy and peace, for he surrounds them on every side, rekindles their fervour, and inflames them with his love. They should respond to these advances by returning love for love, and by holy conduct; then will they realize that they have entered into possession of unutterable blessings which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, and which the heart of man cannot conceive; the Holy Spirit sometimes communicates peace, at other times happiness and life . . . (ix) They who have merited to have dwelling within them this power from on high, and this all-divine fire, which is a participation of the love of the Holy Spirit, are delivered from earthly affections, and from all attachment to evil . . . (xii) If thou hast become the dwelling-place and throne of God, if thy soul should have received an altogether spiritual insight full of light, if thou art nourished with that food which is the Holy Spirit, if thy thirst be quenched with the living water and the spiritual wine which rejoices the heart, if thy soul be clothed with garments of light, thou dost already participate in the life which will be eternally thine, since thou dost already enjoy here below the peace of Christ. But if thou hast not yet received these graces, shed tears and lament that thou dost not possess these treasures. Let it be thy constant prayer to escape from thy misery . . . he who seeks will find; to him who knocks it will be opened."

Here are some extracts from the treatise *On the custody*

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of the heart: Περὶ φυλακῆς καρδίας (col 835-838). "Do violence to yourselves, because the violent gain the kingdom of heaven. He who desires to draw near to the Lord, to become the temple of God, to be worthy of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to produce the fruits of that Spirit, ought first to have a firm faith in him, give himself entirely to fulfilling the commandments, and to renouncing the world so completely that his mind is no longer occupied with earthly matters, but is given up to ceaseless prayer, with the hope of obtaining the help and favourable attention of the Lord. Then he should do himself violence continually in order to practise humility and gentleness with all the works of charity and mercy. . . . He should have ever before his eyes the humility of our Lord, all his conduct and his whole life, as a model to reproduce, and he should employ all his powers in constant prayer that the Lord would come and remain with him, work by him, strengthen him, and aid him to practise every virtue in such a way that he should become the dwelling of Jesus Christ. The Lord, seeing his holy dispositions, his generous efforts and the violence he does to himself to keep before him always a remembrance of God and to practise humility, gentleness, and brotherly love, then shows him his mercy, delivers him from his enemies, purifies him from his sins, and fills him with the Holy Spirit. It is necessary, however, for him who desires to draw near to our Lord to do violence to his nature which is averse to goodness, and to have an immovable confidence in the divine mercy, and to show great charity to his neighbour, to endure all things, to accept contempt, and to do violence to himself, in order to pray until he has received the gift of prayer from our Lord. God, beholding his struggles to do good against his inclinations, then grants him the gift of true prayer through Jesus Christ, and the bowels of mercy and true charity; in a word, he places and preserves in him the fruits of the Holy Ghost. Then, seeing his good dispositions, he bestows on him the power of accomplishing without difficulty that which formerly cost him many struggles. He will enter into this soul, establish his dwelling therein, fulfil by and in it his commandments, and replenish it with the fruits of the Holy Spirit."

46 *b*. The author in his treatise *On prayer*, Περὶ προσευχῆς (I, col. 853), tells us: "The chief point of all spiritual endeavour (to acquire virtue), and the first of good works, is perseverence in prayer, by which we obtain all good things, because he who calls us (to perfection) helps us

with his powerful hand. It is by prayer that he who is worthy obtains the gift of mystical power, and also by prayer is effected union in holy dispositions and in mind, a union produced by unspeakable love.

"It is said, 'Thou hast put joy in my heart,' and our Lord says, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' What can this mean except that the heavenly joy of the Holy Spirit is manifestly given to those who are worthy of it; for the pledge and firstfruits of the eternal rest and happiness enjoyed by the saints in the heavenly kingdom are already communicated to worthy souls here below by the operation of the Holy Spirit. But if, of all good works, prayer is the most perfect, he who applies himself to it should also give the more care to it, for the higher the good to which one aspires the greater are the obstacles which the tempter places in the way."

Then the author teaches that one must struggle with firmness to maintain perseverance in prayer, to overcome sleep, idleness, distracting thoughts, instability of purpose, languor, and other miseries. He then recommends the practice of virtue, for, he says, "if humility, charity, simplicity and goodness do not render prayer a part of our souls, our prayer, or rather the semblance of the prayer that we make, will be useless to us. . . . (xi) There are those who say that man cannot attain perfection or the power of mastering his passions, and of obtaining the fulness of the Holy Spirit; this is in contradiction to the Holy Scriptures, for Christ has said, *Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect. I will that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory* (John xvii, 24). And the Apostle says, 'We preach, admonishing and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.' (Col. i, 28). Moreover, we ought to attain *unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ* (Eph. iv, 13).

We find in the treatise *On charity*, Περὶ ἀγαπῆς (col. 913), the same doctrine, the same description of the favours bestowed on generous souls, the same invitation to prayer, the same call to fight in order to obtain the victory, and the same promise that these graces will be accorded to those who persevere courageously in the struggle against nature and in the practice of virtue.

In his treatise *On liberty of spirit*, Περὶ ἐλευθερίας νοὸς (No. XII, col. 944), the author first shows the man just freed from sin, but who has not yet obtained the favour of feeling in himself the presence of the Holy Spirit accom-

plishing within him his divine operations. Later, when he has received this grace, the Lord is within him in the same manner as his soul, infusing life, and compelling him to act in a divine manner. . . . (xiv) As long as he has not arrived, so far he is still weak and like a child in the spiritual life. . . . (xv) To attain the high degree in which all the passions have been mastered, and in which the consolations and repose of the Holy Spirit are enjoyed, he must for a long time have sustained hard trials; and the harder the struggle has been, the more painful the temptations and cruel the suffering, the more abundant will be the consolations of the Holy Spirit. . . . (xix) Those only receive these priceless graces who, in order to pray well, have done violence to themselves, and who have practised humility, charity, sweetness, and other virtues. Those who do not apply themselves generously to this work either lose the graces they have already received or cease to advance.

5. *St Basil.*

47. In St Basil's writings we find counsels for arriving at the knowledge of God which recall the doctrine of St Clement of Alexandria. We can form a judgement about this in reading the beautiful example drawn from the Homily on Faith (No. 1): "If you would speak worthily of God, or understand what has been written about him, free yourself of your body, of your senses, give up the earth, abandon the seas, tread the air under foot, cast behind you all that is temporal, all that follows in regular order, all the beauty here below, raise yourself above the stars, and above all that strikes you with admiration in them, their brilliance, their grandeur, their beneficial influence on the world, their position and movements, the connection between them, and the distances that separate them. Go in spirit beyond the whole universe, fly above the heavens, and, soaring in those sublime heights, direct the eyes of your soul towards the most beautiful of all created beings; look at the heavenly hosts, the choirs of angels, consider the dignity of the Archangels, the glory of the Dominations, the high places of the Thrones, the Virtues, the Principalities, the Powers; then, passing by all these angelic natures and rising in thought beyond and above all creatures, contemplate the divine nature, steadfast, unchangeable, exempt from every vicissitude and from all emotion, simple and indivisible, light inaccessible, power ineffable, greatness unlimited,

brightness of inexpressible glory, goodness supremely desirable, unrivalled beauty causing an ineffable wound of love in the enraptured soul, but all the majesty of which human language is powerless to describe."

48. St Basil then recommends as the right means of arriving at the contemplation of the divine Being, at that contemplation wherein the enraptured soul receives an ineffable wound of love, the same process of elimination that we have seen to be advised by the preceding doctors; but he holds with them that purity of heart is necessary if the soul would rise to these heights.

"He who has been able to purify himself from earthly affections, to cast away from him all distinctions of creatures, and, like the fish which rises from the depths of the ocean to the surface, take his flight above all creatures, having recovered his original purity, can turn his gaze on the divine Spirit, one with the Father and the Son; for all three Persons are one in essence and nature, and possess in common goodness, justice, holiness and life."

6. *St Gregory of Nyssa.*

49. St Gregory of Nyssa, St Basil's brother, also recommends the same method in his *Life of Moses*.

"Moses entered into the darkness without fear. He was then in the world of invisible beings and was imperceptible to mortal eyes; therefore to penetrate into the mysteries and incomprehensible region of the divine initiation, where he holds converse with the hidden God, he disappears from the sight of his brethren in order to teach us that, if we wish to enjoy the divine intercourse, we must despise all that appeals to the senses, raise our minds towards the invisible and incomprehensible Being as towards a sublime summit, and realize that God is where thought cannot reach."

50. And elsewhere, alluding to the words spoken by God to Moses, *Put off thy shoes*, he understands them to be a symbol of the detachment necessary to arrive at the knowledge of God.

"The first thing on which the Man-God, that burning torch of our souls, will enlighten us will be the means we should take to arrive at the light of truth. He will make us understand that our feet must not be hampered to prevent us mounting to that summit where truth is made manifest, but must be freed from that coarse and lifeless covering which entangles the feet of our souls since the day of original sin, on which we refused

obedience to the decree of God. Thus disengaged, we gain the knowledge of Him who is, and repulse the lying seductions of things that are not. It seems to me that truth can be defined as the certain knowledge of Him who is, while error is a lying idea, attributing being to what has no existence. It is necessary to give oneself up, in repose and silence, to profound meditation, in order clearly to understand the nature of creatures who have no existence of themselves. Well, it seems to me that Moses, that great servant of God, learnt in that vision the nothingness of all that appeals to the senses, or which the reason can grasp; he learnt that nothing exists with a real existence except the Supreme Being, the first and sovereign cause of all beings."[1]

51. "Should the Christian make continual progress, he will be raised to sublime heights. Certainly anyone who has been strengthened by food,[2] who has fought valiantly and has vanquished his enemies,[3] will obtain an indescribable knowledge of God. . . . The history of Moses teaches us by designating how many and what works we must have accomplished to arrive at this high mountain, which is the knowledge of God. . . . We must, with a right intention, have fought and killed the tyrant; we must also have drunk of the waters of bitterness by living far from voluptuous pleasures, a life at first bitter and painful, but one which, like the waters of Marah, when softened by the wood thrown into it (Exod. xvi, 25), becomes pleasant and soft. We must have tasted the rest after labour under the palms and by the fountains, which here represent the doctrine of the Gospel. We must have quenched our thirst with the living water flowing from the rock, which is Christ. We must be nourished with a heavenly food, have come to grips with the enemy and have vanquished him, and this victory, which is indicated by the arms of Moses outstretched in the form of a cross, can only be obtained by the cross. When all this has been accomplished, then only shall we be admitted to the contemplation of the divine nature. To attain this, it does not suffice to purify the mind and the body by the

[1] "Dost thou know, my daughter," said our Lord one day to St Catherine of Siena, "what thou art and what I am? If thou learnest these two things thou wilt be blessed: thou art she who is not, and I am He who is. If thy soul is imbued with this truth the enemy cannot deceive thee, thou wilt avoid every snare, thou wilt never consent to do anything contrary to my commandments, and thou wilt acquire without difficulty grace, truth, and peace.

[2] An allusion to the manna.

[3] Allusion to the defeat of the Amalekites (Exod. xviii).

rite of aspersion; spotless garments are also necessary, and by this is meant that the purification must not only be interior, but that the exterior should share in the interior dispositions. What, then, is this external appearance by which we are prevented from rising to God. It is the schemes and cares of this life; in these man is entangled and enwrapped, and they must be clean with a spotless purity. When care has been taken to entertain none but holy thoughts, when the unclean flock has been driven far away from the mountain, then can the soul rise to the highest contemplation. Does not this teach us that we ought to reject entirely that imperfect knowledge which reaches the intelligible only through sensible images?

52. "To give ourselves up to the contemplation of God we make use neither of eyes nor ears, nor of the ordinary method of reasoning and understanding—*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man* (1 Cor. ii, 9). It is necessary, therefore, if we desire to arrive at the contemplation of God, to purify the understanding of all that is sensible and material, to cast away from the mind all that appeals to the senses, to renounce all commerce with the body to which the soul is united, and only thus can we hope to draw nigh to the mountain.

"This steep mountain, so difficult of access that ordinary Christians are only acquainted with its lower declivities, is nothing else than theology, or the science of God."

53. More than once is this word "theology" found in the works of the Fathers to designate a knowledge of God obtained, not by study, or the investigations of reason, but by the light of grace. Later, up to the time of St Teresa,[1] is added an epithet to distinguish it from speculative theology; it is called *mystical theology*, and continues to be identified with contemplation.

7. *St Ephrem.*

The word "theology" is found with the same meaning in the Latin translation of St Ephrem, and the holy deacon of Edessa also teaches that this knowledge is the privilege of a perfect life free of earthly cares.

54. "Let us apply ourselves, my dear friend, to the spiritual life in order that, adding good works to faith, we may become perfect. Only thus can we become learned

[1] See her *Life*, ch. x and xii. *Cf.* St Maximus, *Centuria*, II, "De Caritate," No. 26; St John of the Cross, *Ascent*, ii, 7; *Night*, ii, 5 and 17; St Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, Bk. VI, ch. 1.

in *theology*, when we have subdued our passions, destroyed all our natural affections, and emptied our minds of all preoccupations. Then will the Holy Spirit, finding peace in our souls, communicate new power to our intellect, and illuminate our heart, just as a lamp already provided with wick and oil is kindled by contact with flame and spreads around it a pleasant and cheerful light. But if we are still tormented and dominated by our passions we are in great danger, and like a lamp without oil or wick, which cannot even for a moment communicate any benefit of warmth or light. Therefore, before all things, let us make ready our souls for the reception of divine light, and let us thus render ourselves more worthy of the gifts of God" (*De Virtute*, cap. x).

8. *St Gregory Nazianzen.*

55. St Gregory Nazianzen holds the same opinion. "The beginning of wisdom is fear. We ought not to begin with contemplation and end with fear. This kind of contemplation, which is without restraint, would carry us over a precipice. But, taught in the first place by fear, purified by it, and, if I may say so, crushed and reduced to nothing, we may then rise to the highest spiritual regions" (*Oratio* xxxix, No. 8).

56. In his panegyric on St Athanasius (No. 6), he says again that it is by a life of this kind—that is, by good works and fidelity to grace—that one can arrive at contemplation, and that contemplation is like a seal set on our works.[1] "For," he adds, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but when, having passed beyond fear, a man is led by wisdom to true charity, this virtue makes of him from a servant the friend and child of God. . . .

"Before all things one must purify oneself; it is only after this purification that one can hold intercourse with Him who is purity itself. . . . One must mortify this vile and gross body and bring it into subjection in order to receive, like Zacheus, the visit of the Word, and to bear more perfect fruit.

"In fact," he repeats, "when we shall have guarded our hearts with the utmost vigilance (Prov. iv, 23), when we shall have made interior preparations for our ascents and spiritual progress (Ps. lxxxiii, 6), when, having prepared the ground for cultivation (Jer. iv, 3), we shall have sowed seeds of sanctity, and when, following thus

[1] Βιῳ μεν ὁδηγῳ θεωρίας, θεωριᾳ δε σφραγιδι βιου χρησαμενος.

the advice of Solomon, of David, and of Jeremias, we shall have attracted to ourselves the light of (supernatural) knowledge, then shall we be enabled to speak the language of the hidden and mysterious wisdom of God (1 Cor. ii, 7), and to enlighten our brethren.

But for this let us first purify ourselves . . . let us make ourselves like unto God; then we shall receive the visit of the Word, we shall keep him within us, and make him shine before men" (*Oratio* xxxix, Nos. 9, 10).

9. *St Diadochus.*

57. St Diadochus, Bishop of Phocæa in Epirus, lived in the fifth century. He is quoted by St Maximus. He composed a very interesting *Treatise on Perfection.*[1] His intention is to lead the soul to contemplation and to mystical love; this he makes to be clearly understood from his first words, and the whole treatise manifestly tends to this end. The following is the beginning of this work, which is composed of one hundred very short chapters:

Ch. i: "All spiritual contemplation supposes and requires faith, hope, and charity, especially the latter, for these virtues lead to it. Faith and hope teach us to despise visible things, but charity unites us to God, and makes us endeavour to know Him who is the invisible Being, by a certain spiritual faculty."

The saintly author often reverts to this spiritual sense, *αἰσθήσις νοέρα*, by which we gain the knowledge and taste the sweetness of God. This is how he explains it (ch. xxv): "Our souls have a natural sense (means of knowledge), *αἴσθησιν φύσικην*, but since the sin of Adam this has been at variance, and produces two kinds of operation (that which is good and that which is evil, as St Diadochus explains in ch. xxix). But there is another sense (or means of knowledge), and a very simple one, which the soul receives from the Holy Spirit, which only those can experience who renounce the pleasures of this life to obtain heavenly treasures, and who, by temperance, have overcome the concupiscence of the flesh. These, having the mind freed from useless solicitude, enjoy perfect spiritual health, and can feel conscious of the divine goodness, which is truly inexpressible, and communicate its delights to the body in a varying measure according to the progress accomplished. In its joy the soul then bursts forth into transports of love.

[1] Published by Weis-Liebersdorf, Leipzig, Teubner, 1912.

The Psalmist says: *In him hath my heart confided, and I have been helped, and my flesh hath flourished again, and I will give praise to him*" (Ps. xxvii, 7).

Ch. xxx: "The spiritual sense is a perfect taste, γεῦσις ἀκριβῆς, giving a clear insight into things. As the bodily sense of taste makes us, when in robust health, discern and desire things that are good, in the same way the soul, when free from all disorder and delivered from worldly cares, can feel the abundance of divine consolations. . . . Having renounced the prudence of the flesh, the consolations of the Holy Spirit can be experienced, according to the saying of Holy Scripture: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.*"

It is in this sense that St Diadochus understands the words "reasonable soul," or the reasonable spirit, as later mystical authors understand them. However, it is not by reasonings that God makes himself known to souls truly detached who have arrived at a state of holy indifference, as St Diadochus remarks, but by greater lights communicated under the veil of love. This love is above reason, and mystics willingly admit that God can be reached and enjoyed by senses higher than those of the body, by spiritual senses.

St Diadochus very wisely remarks, however, that these senses of the soul do not make God perceptible (ch. xxxvi). "Let no one on hearing of a spiritual sense count on seeing the glory of God with his bodily eyes. What we say is, that after having purified one's soul, one can be conscious of the presence of God by experiencing his divine consolations, which are impossible to describe; but not that God renders himself visible, since, as St Paul says, here below *we walk by faith and not by sight* (2 Cor. v, 7)." We shall see further on the description given by the holy Bishop of this state in which the soul, without seeing God, acquires mystical light and the sweetness of love. Let us first find out by what means he would have us dispose ourselves for the reception of these gifts.

In the first place it is necessary to practise virtue, and especially the virtue of charity. In this way alone is it possible to become like unto God (ch. ii). St Diadochus asks, How and when does a man become good? Only God is good by nature. Man becomes good when by practising virtue he cleaves to God, and he proves his desire of being united to God by the degree of virtue he practises with this end in view. (Ch. iv) We are all made in the likeness of God, but only those resemble God who through their great love for him have made themselves his

slaves. When we have ceased to serve ourselves we shall become like to Him who has reconciled us to himself by virtue of his love. This we cannot aspire to until we despise the vainglory of this world. (Ch. v) Our will must be prompt only to do well, and we should always drive away all evil imaginations and encourage only good thoughts. The holy Bishop recommends silence, which he calls the mother of recollection (ch. lxx), also prayer, almsgiving, humility, obedience, mortification, and fasting (*passim*). "He who is full of self-love cannot love God, while he who is replenished with the treasures of divine love has overcome love of self; he who truly loves no longer seeks his own glory, but the glory of God."

(Ch. xxii): It is particularly purity of the soul, recollection, and the efforts made to become united to God which dispose the soul for the reception of mystical graces, and for being raised to a state of perfection. (Ch. xxiii): "When conscience reproaches us we do not enjoy the happiness of heavenly peace . . . but when by more fervent prayer we purify our hearts, then do we obtain the object of our desires, God, making himself more united to the soul. (Ch. xxvi) Those who are fighting the good fight should keep their souls free from trouble, so that, discerning the thoughts that come to them, they may retain those that come from God, and repulse those that are evil and from the devil. When the sea is calm the fishermen can look into its depths, and no fish can escape their scrutiny; when it is ruffled by the wind, nothing can be seen, and the fishermen cannot carry on their work. It is the same with contemplatives, especially if the depths of their soul are disturbed by unjust anger."

(Ch. lix): "When, by keeping well the recollection of God, we have prevented all the wandering of our minds, these, so as to make use of every resource, will claim something else. Then, in order to attain the end we have in view, we should keep our thoughts on these words, 'O Lord Jesus Christ!' for no one can say 'Lord Jesus' except in the Holy Spirit. May we cleave to this word and guard it so well in the depths of our hearts that it may chase away all vain imaginations; for those who keep this holy and glorious name in their hearts have their minds enlightened from above. Thanks to the generous efforts they make to retain it, those stains which their souls contract from moment to moment are speedily obliterated, for God is a consuming fire (Deut. iv, 24), and he at once revives in these souls their love of his greatness. This glorious and desirable name, if recalled constantly with all the

fervour of a loving heart, engenders an habitual love of the divine goodness. This is the precious stone which must be purchased by the sale of all our possessions, and the discovery of which causes unspeakable joy."

(Ch. lxxv): "Just as the air by which we are surrounded remains pure when it blows from the north, and, on the contrary, condenses and is charged with mists when it blows from the south, so the soul under the influence of the breath of the Holy Spirit is protected against the mists raised by the devil; while, on the contrary, when greatly disturbed by the gusts of error, it is soon enveloped in the mists of sin. Let us, therefore, always turn towards the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit, that divine Spirit which Ezechiel by divine light saw coming from the north. So that the part of the soul engaged in contemplation may be always peaceful, and that we may be able without error to contemplate divine things."

58. In this state, which is the state of the perfect, light is received directly from God, and this light leads to love.

(Ch. xxviii): "Only the Holy Spirit can purify the soul. . . . The Apostle tells us: 'Extinguish not the Holy Spirit'—that is to say, do not sadden him by your evil conduct, nor by your unruly thoughts, so that he may not deprive you of his light. When he is saddened and turns his face away from you, then will you fall into darkness."

(Ch. vi): "The true light is that which clearly shows how to distinguish good from evil; having received it, the soul, sincerely seeking after charity, follows the path of justice wherein it receives an illumination almost infinite."

(Ch. viii): "It is useless to apply oneself to contemplation if one's mind is not sufficiently enlightened; and should one be overwhelmed with light from above, one must not begin to speak too soon. Where there is a want of light there is ignorance; where there is a superabundance of light it is impossible to express oneself, for the soul, intoxicated with divine love, desires only to enjoy in silence the contemplation of the glory of God."

(Ch. ix): "From this same Holy Spirit proceed wisdom and knowledge, wisdom which is the gift of speaking in a holy manner, and knowledge which enlightens the soul and at the same time unites it experimentally to God."

It is not only on the greatness of God that the soul is enlightened but also about its own misery.

(Ch. xxvii): There are very few indeed, says St Diadochus, who have a thorough knowledge of their own faults. The man who has taken great pains to overcome evil desires will shed tears over his faults, even the least;

while, on the contrary, those who constantly give way to their passions are no longer conscious of having any sins save the very greatest, and vehemently excuse all their other faults.

How salutary these infused lights are, St Diadochus proclaims openly in this other passage:

(Ch. lxvii): "All divine gifts are precious: they are the origin of all good; but nothing inflames our hearts nor makes us love the God of all goodness more than the gift of theology[1] . . . this gift makes us renounce voluntarily all worldly affections, and, rejecting evil desires, esteem more than we can say the treasures of the divine teaching. It enlightens our minds and changes the nature of our souls in communicating to them angelic qualities. This, dear brethren, is the gift that we ought to desire, and for which we ought to dispose ourselves. It is an admirable gift; by it we are altogether raised to a state of contemplation, we are freed from all care, we are filled with bright ineffable light, our minds are nourished with the divine teaching, and, in short, we are united inseparably with the word of God."

Therefore, this salutary light tends greatly to the love of God; the soul is inflamed as well as enlightened.

(Ch. xiv): "God recognizes and acknowledges as his the soul of one who loves him wholeheartedly. . . . He who loses sight of self and is quite transformed by the love of God is still imprisoned in mortal flesh, but is as though out of himself and lost in God; his heart is on fire, and by the strength of its desires it adheres to God."

But love communicated thus by the divine Spirit is not always a source of consolation; it may remain unperceived.

(Ch. xiii): "I knew someone," says the holy Bishop, "who wept because he could not love God as much as he desired; he loved him so much that he constantly sighed after him, desiring only the divine glory, and being nothing in his own eyes." It was his humility, concludes St Diadochus, which hid from him this love.

See, then, how, while a man is making efforts, grace exercises him and makes him advance. But the divine action changes its character; at the beginning of the spiritual life God gives sensible consolations, acting on the inferior

[1] Here we again see the word "theology" employed in the sense of the knowledge of God through the light of contemplation. St Diadochus in the same book (ch. lxxii) speaks of the theologian as of one who has the gift of contemplation.

We may also quote St John Climacus (twenty-eighth degree), who says: "Those may rightly be called theologians who, in prayer, are penetrated and inflamed with a fire that is sacred and all divine."

faculties; later, when the soul has made great progress, he infuses peace and mystical sweetness. St Diadochus does not actually employ these terms, but he so well describes these two kinds of grace that one cannot be mistaken.

He takes care to note that the soul begins by fearing before it can love.

(Ch. xvi): "No one can love God with a reasonable love if he has not first learnt to fear him, because by the fear of God he is rendered pure and tractable, and applies himself to the practice of love. To gain this fear of God it is necessary to become freed from all the cares of life. When temporal cares have been renounced, then the fear of God enters the soul, purifies it, and, making it cast away all that is coarse and earthly, leads it to a great love for the goodness of God. Therefore, fear with an admixture of love that is yet feeble is the condition of those who are still in a state of purification; but such as are purified have perfect love unmixed with fear. As St John says, 'Perfect love casteth out fear.'"

After fear, follows very quickly a first period of consolations; then follows a second period of trials and aridity, called by St John of the Cross the night of the senses; then, if these trials are borne with love, peace succeeds struggle, and the soul enters into the mystical state, so consoling to it:

(Ch. xc): "At the beginning of the spiritual life the Holy Spirit grants great sweetness to the soul who seeks virtue with ardour. By these consolations he desires to give some idea of the rewards laid up for those who struggle manfully, and then immediately after he conceals for a long time these delightful favours (in order to teach them humility). . . . They should persevere in their efforts and struggles until they have gained a full taste for divine things, which is only accorded to those holy souls who are true martyrs and perfect confessors of God. . . . Those, therefore, who are near perfection can frequently enjoy God, but to enjoy him fully is reserved for those in whom all that is earthly and mortal has given place to life itself."

59. The mystics of every age continue to note the difference between the sensible consolations of beginners, which affect only the lower part of the soul, and the sweetness of the more advanced, the infused peace, and the profound delights which may take possession of the whole soul. St Diadochus has well analyzed these two kinds of grace. In chapter lxxiii he shows that sensible sweetness renders the soul more fervent, more exuberant, and that the mystical graces, which are deeper, produce great peace.

"When these natural fruits (that is to say, the sweetness in the exercise of the faculties of reason, imagination, and sensibility) are more abundant, the psalms are sung in a louder voice, and a greater attraction is felt for vocal prayer; but when the Holy Spirit works interiorly, then they are sung with a full heart but more softly, and prayers are recited in the heart.

The saint then gives this practical advice: "When we experience great sadness we should sing the psalms more loudly and make our souls speak, reviving them with hope until this thick fog is dispersed by the breath of psalmody." When, instead of giving way to depression, we are under the influence of mystical favours, the repose of contemplation will be preferred to vocal prayer, to which we shall not be able to apply ourselves without pain. To this doctrine of modern mysticism, that which St Diadochus teaches is very suitable (chap. lxviii): "Very often we feel a repugnance to (vocal) prayer which restricts the soul and holds it bound, but it willingly turns to theology, because the contemplation of heavenly things enlarges and sets it at ease." The holy author, however, does not approve of giving oneself exclusively to contemplation, but desires that application should be made also to the chanting of psalms, the study of Holy Scripture, and the works of reliable commentators; he considers that there is security in this, because "in this way one is preserved from the danger of mixing one's own ideas with the divine words, and also from the danger of vainglory." He sees also in this interchange of vocal and mental prayer a happy variety which gives rest to the mind and facilitates prayer: "More than this, even in moments given to contemplation, the mind will be less inclined to wander, and will more easily turn to thoughts that touch the heart and make tears flow, for during these moments of peace and quiet the soul, revived and charmed by the sweet delights of prayer, is not only delivered from faults, but at the same time acquires fresh strength, and this strength is at once employed in the contemplation of divine things, in which humility causes great progress to be made."

Let us note also the following words by which the holy Bishop distinguishes between the sensible graces given to beginners and those more perfect ones bestowed on more advanced souls:

(Ch. lxxxviii): "He who during the winter always turns towards the sun feels the heat on the front of his body, but the rest does not share in this beneficent warmth; so those who are at the beginning of the spiritual life receive only

some measure of the gentle warmth of divine grace. Thus, therefore, does the soul taste the fruit of good and spiritual thoughts, but the heart still feels carnal desires, because all is not as yet under the influence of the light of grace. . . . If we have managed to keep all the divine commandments, the grace of God, penetrating more deeply and enlightening all our senses, will consume all our thoughts, and place the heart in a state of firm and constant peace (with God) and fill it with sweetness; it will assure to our minds the nourishment of spiritual things instead of those that are earthly; and this is the case frequently with those who are nearly perfect and who have at heart a constant remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ."

(Ch. xxix): "If we contract a habit of despising that which the world admires and appreciates, we can feel an admiration for all that is holy and spiritual both with the inferior appetite and the reasoning faculties. The Holy Spirit produces in us these effects of grace, for if the divine goodness did not penetrate our whole souls with his splendour we should not be able to appreciate virtue with our whole being."

It is the same doctrine, too, which we encounter when St Diadochus shows us the difference between acquired or ascetic charity, otherwise that of the beginner, and mystical or infused charity, which is that of those who are completely detached. The first he calls natural, taking the word in the same sense as St John of the Cross, as the love which is exercised according to the laws of nature, and is aroused by considerations and reasonings; and the second he calls spiritual, because it is infused into the soul by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

(Ch. xxxiv): "There is a natural love of God, and a different love which comes from the Holy Spirit. The first is weak, and can be produced by our own efforts; but it is very easy for the devil to interpose obstacles if we make no effort to keep the resolutions we have voluntarily taken. The love infused by the Holy Spirit produces so great a fervour that the whole soul, filled with ineffable sweetness, is as if melted and every part united in one simple act of love."

(Ch. lxxiv): "When self-knowledge has been acquired, a degree of fervour and humility very pleasing to God is the result, and no further solicitude for the things of this life being felt, a certain love of peace impelling a groping after the God of peace is experienced; but distractions from this love quickly arise either by the treachery of the

senses or else because nature, being poor and feeble, has speedily used up all its virtue. . . . But the burning love infused by the Holy Spirit turns the heart entirely to a peace which is constant, and takes possession of all the powers of the soul, making them aspire after God; it does not go out of the heart, but remains to rejoice the whole person, drawing it to an immense charity full of delight. One must have experienced this fervent love, and have entered into possession of it, for although natural love indicates clearly that, thanks to the practice of virtue, the soul is in a good state, yet it cannot procure freedom from passions, which is effected by spiritual love."

Consoling graces have never yet led any soul to perfection; trials and temptations are also necessary; this is very clearly explained by St Diadochus.

(Ch. lxix): "Usually at the beginning, grace which is very sensibly felt communicates light to the soul; but later, when it is in the throes of the struggle, grace works in the soul which is given to divine contemplation in a hidden and mysterious manner. At the beginning we are filled with joy when we enter upon divine things; it is the joy of the ignorant who are learning something new. Later when the struggle continues we must be careful to keep ourselves free from all desires of vainglory. We should then doubtless feel afflicted in some degree at being as though forsaken by God, but we are in this state only to make us more submissive, and more ready to glorify him; therefore, we should combine joy with our pain on account of the good we hope to obtain by it (the good which will result from this trial)."

(Ch. lxxvii): "From the moment of our baptism grace is secretly present in the highest part of the soul, but its presence escapes our senses. When we have begun to love God with all our hearts, then, in an inexplicable manner is communicated to our souls, spiritually, some share of his favours. Therefore, whosoever wishes to keep what he has gained is easily brought to renounce all the goods of this life to purchase the field in which is buried his treasure. . . . According to the measure of the progress made are we enlightened by the grace of God to understand his divine goodness. Nevertheless, God allows the devils to assail us more violently in order that we may learn to discern good from evil, and that becoming purified (by these trials) we may become more docile the more humiliated we are by the shameful imaginations with which our minds are filled by the devils."

St Diadochus greatly insists on the fact that we may

often have at the same time both holy and vile thoughts. Among other things, he says on this subject:

(Ch. lxxxv): "Among those who are baptized the presence of grace is at first hidden, waiting for the soul to make choice (of good). When one turns with one's whole heart to God, then God, in making himself known in a spiritual and inexplicable manner, shows that he is present in the centre of the soul. He continues to await the movements of our souls, and meanwhile allows the devils to let fly their shafts at them in order to induce them to seek him with greater fervour and with more humble submission. If, thereafter, we begin to make progress in the observance of the commandments, and if we constantly have the holy name of Jesus on our lips, then the fire of grace will penetrate our hearts at their surface, and all the weeds of that earth which is man will be consumed. . . . When he who is fighting the good fight has practised every virtue and has become detached from all created things, and has no desire to possess anything, then grace penetrates more deeply and inflames him with a very great love. In this way the wounds inflicted by the devils are healed. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that God allows the devil, who is full of wickedness, to assail the man who is making so much progress, and he leaves him in darkness, not only because battle is the occasion of victories, but also because man must make further progress in the experience of spiritual things."

10. *Dionysius the Mystic.*

60. In the sixth century there began to be much talk of a mystical writer who was destined to acquire very great celebrity; the author of the works known under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. We call him simply Dionysius.[1] None can ignore the great influence exercised by his books in the Church from the sixth century and especially in the Middle Ages. The most illustrious doctors and the greatest saints were reared on these works, and

[1] Who was the author of these writings and at what period he lived is a question that has never been answered. It remains more obscure than some suppose. Dionysius was greatly valued at all times by those mystics who, having had personal experience of the states he describes, understand and admire him. Of those who do not possess this experience, and amongst the learned these are the most numerous, some share in the admiration of the mystics, while others are severe and occasionally unjust to Dionysius. They show, moreover, that the doctrine of the great contemplative is above their capacity, therefore their criticisms do not deprive him of any merit.

made it their pleasure to comment upon them. They cited them constantly, and all assign the author an exceptional place in the ranks of sacred scientists. All look upon him as a master among the masters, and certainly this writer, whoever he may have been, merits this reputation, so deep and so lofty is his doctrine, so sure his knowledge, his works so full of piety and unction.

61. What, then, is the doctrine of Dionysius on the question of which we are treating?

Clement of Alexandria had divided the spiritual life into three phases; Dionysius treats it in the same way; the life of purgation, of illumination, and of perfection appear again and again under his pen. Through him this division, already so well grounded, has become classic.

Treating in a general sense of the subordination of creatures, of their separate classes, and of their duties one towards another, he says that this hierarchy, this subjection of some and predominance of others, "has for aim to assimilate as far as possible the creature to the Creator and to unite him to God. Perfection for the members of the hierarchy consists in their elevation to the imitation of God with their whole strength, and, what is still more divine, in becoming, according to the Holy Scriptures, co-operators with God, and thus manifesting in themselves with all possible distinctness the divine operation.

"The hierarchical order exacts that some should purify, and that others should be purified; that some should enlighten, and others be enlightened; that some should improve, and others be improved; so that each should have his own way of imitating God. It would appear necessary that those who are purified should gradually have nothing more to expiate; that those that have been enlightened should shine with a divine brightness, and lift the eyes of their intellect, and raise themselves to the power and habit of contemplation; in fine, that those who have become perfect should participate, directly they are freed from imperfection, more and more in the sanctifying knowledge of those secret truths made manifest to contemplatives" (*Celestial Hierarchy*, c. iii, 2, 3).

62. On the subject of divine love and its properties St Dionysius has the most exact and beautiful ideas. "Love," he says, "is ecstatic; it takes those who are possessed by it out of themselves, so much so that they can no longer control themselves, but are entirely wrapped up in the object of their love," and he gives as an example the case of superiors who submit to inferiors by devoting themselves to them, equals who are bound together by

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their mutual communications, and inferiors who seem entirely to depend on their superiors for the courage and strength they derive from them. With far more reason can this be said of divine love, which withdraws the soul from its own life to live the life of Christ (*Divine Names*, iv, 12, 13).

He also recommends that we should forsake ourselves for the love of God. Self may be forsaken by the mind and by the heart; by the mind when we cease to fall back on the contemplation of self, or even cease to attach ourselves to the working of the understanding which gives only an incomplete knowledge of God; by the heart, by ceasing to have an egoistic self-love, by forgetting oneself. One can forget self to unite oneself to God by an act of the mind in renouncing its own light to cast itself into the abyss of infinity; and by an action of the heart uniting itself to God in an ineffable union. This is the meaning of the words *excessus mentis* so frequently to be met with in the works of spiritual authors,[1] and so rarely understood. "You must know," says St Dionysius "that we possess a certain faculty (reason) by which our understanding takes hold of intelligible things, but there is also a union which places us in communication with something higher than ourselves, with that to which our mind cannot naturally attain. Now, it is by this latter method that we should take hold of divine things; not by lowering them to our own level, but by going out of ourselves to give ourselves entirely to God, because it is better to belong to him than to ourselves, and thus God can give himself to those who abandon themselves to him" (*Divine Names*, vii, 1).

In this way also divine love produces an intimacy between God and man, a fusion higher than ordinary minds can measure (*Divine Names*, iv, 12).

63. St Dionysius therefore teaches that divine union is not brought about by mental processes. It is difficult to find any pages more beautiful than those that he has written on the greatness and incomprehensibility of God. No one has so insisted on the truth that what we know bears no resemblance to God, and that all that we can say of him is far from the ineffable reality. This is why, if indeed we can know God through his created works, all knowledge of this sort is necessarily imperfect. "There is," he says, "a more perfect knowledge of God which

[1] It is this same flight of the contemplative soul towards God that mystical authors call the "anagogical act," an expression that Rodriguez considered incomprehensible (*Of Prayer*, ch. 4).

results from a sublime ignorance, and is acquired in an incomprehensible union; this is when, leaving all things and forgetting self, one is plunged into the floods of divine glory and enlightened in the splendid depths of unfathomable wisdom" (*Divine Names*, vii, 3).

64. This knowledge, so elevated and salutary, God willingly accords to the well-disposed, to those full of humility, and, at the same time, of a generous fervour, full of confidence. "He raises to contemplation of him, and communication with him, and resemblance to him those who, their goodwill impelling them towards him with fervent impetuosity, neither covet by foolish pride more light than has been allotted to them, nor succumb to the temptation of a shameful lethargy, but follow the light without hesitation or inconstancy, and with a love equal to their light and a holy respect, prudently take their flight towards the most sublime heights" (*Divine Names*, i, 2).

65. In his *Mystical Theology* (ch. ii), Dionysius indicates what should be done by those who, according to him, "aspire to enter within this translucent obscurity, to see and to know precisely by this mystical ignorance him who is invisible and unknowable." They must first pray, for this is a gift of God. The author, accordingly, begins his treatise with a prayer, "Trinity, Super-essential, most divine, sovereignly good, whose holy wisdom is the guide of Christians, conduct us to this sublime height, which can neither be described nor seen by human eyes."

He goes on to give the method to be followed in this celebrated passage:

"Do you, my dear Timothy, exercise yourself unremittingly in mystical contemplation; put aside the senses and the operations of the understanding, all that is material or intellectual, all things that do or do not exist,[1] and taking flight supernaturally, unite yourself as intimately as possible with him who is above all being and all knowledge. For it is by this sincere, spontaneous, and total surrender of yourself and of all things that, free and delivered from every tie, you will be able to penetrate into the mysterious brightness of the divine obscurity."[2]

[1] The human mind, alas! pauses more frequently to dwell upon what has no existence, and never will have, than upon reality.

[2] This passage was, by the way, considered during the Middle Ages as being the fundamental text of mystical teaching. Therefore, all the holy doctors, all the spiritual authors, quoted it, developed it, and depended on it for their doctrine of contemplation. It seems to be forgotten or but little appreciated by the greater number of the writers of our own day. [Since this note was written in 1900, this passage has become better known.]

66. The advice given by Dionysius in his sketch does not suit everyone. It is not intended for those "who are not worthy—that is to say, for those who are attached to creatures, who do not conceive of the existence of a super-substantial (ὑπερούσιος) being, those who imagine they can obtain, by the power of their own minds, knowledge of him who has hidden himself in darkness."[1] Neither is this advice addressed to those who remain in the first or the second degree of the spiritual life, purification or illumination. "Moses was enjoined first to purify himself, and then to separate from the unworthy,[2] and when this purification had been accomplished he heard sounds of trumpets and saw fires which gave out bright innumerable rays,[3] whereupon leaving the multitude he climbed with some chosen priests to the summit of the holy mount. . . . It is after the soul has been freed from the world of sense and of intellect that it enters the mysterious obscurity of a holy ignorance; renouncing every scientific gift to be lost in him who can neither be seen nor felt. Becoming entirely absorbed in this divine object, the soul belongs neither to itself nor to others, but united to the unknown by its noblest part, and having forsaken science, it draws from this absolute ignorance a knowledge that no teaching can impart" (*Mystical Theology*, i, 3).[4]

II. *St Maximus.*

67. St Maximus was a very remarkable writer of the seventh century. At first a secretary of Heraclius, he afterwards left the court and embraced the monastic state, and was made Abbot of Chrysopolis near Constantinople. After heroically enduring torments for the faith, after having had his tongue torn out and his hand cut off by the order of the Emperor Constans II, for having constantly combated the heresy of Monothelitism, he died in exile on August 13, 662. At different times St Maximus has indicated the progress of the faithful soul in the way of perfection, and he always shows that the end of the spiritual life is complete detachment and the perfect love which is exercised in contemplation. "All contemplatives, armed with the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, have annihilated in themselves those impulses which attract them towards or are produced by creatures, and by

[1] An allusion to the words of the Psalm: *Posuit tenebras latibulum suum* (Ps. xvii, 12).
[2] By this we understand the purgative way.
[3] This is an illustration of the illuminative way.
[4] See in *The Mystical State*, other important passages of this author.

doing so they have acquired virtue; having cut short all imaginations and representations of sensible objects, they have found truth, which enables them to reason justly about everything; then, rising above all created things, they are enlightened by the Creator of all things, the Unity infinite and supreme. From this enlightenment proceeds a true and mysterious theology" (*P.G.*, XC, col. 1217; *Cent.*, I, 94).

St Maximus usually makes the way to perfection begin with fear and end in contemplation.

"It is said in Holy Scripture that fear is the beginning of wisdom. Taking flight from this base, we mount to the summit of wisdom, which is the understanding. When we have attained to this we become united to God, and the bond uniting us to him is no other than wisdom itself" (*Cent.*, III, No. 41, c. 1277). "Leaving those beings that are furthest from God and nearest to us, we ascend to those which are further from us and nearer to God. At first, indeed, from the flight from sin, which fear makes us avoid, we pass on to the practice of virtue, thence to the right use of the will (that is to say, in making prudent decisions), and from that to the habit of virtue, from the habit of virtue to the knowledge of the properties of the virtues, from that to a disposition which transforms the soul and renders us capable of participating in all those virtues which we have practised, and from this to the simple but very exact contemplation of the truth" (*Ibid.*, No. 40). "He who believes fears, he who fears becomes humble and gentle, he who is humble and gentle keeps the commandments, he who keeps the commandments is purified, he who is purified is enlightened, he who is enlightened merits to penetrate into the most secret mysteries, and therein to enjoy the embrace of the Eternal Word, the spouse of his soul" (*Cent.*, I, No. 16, col. 1089).

"Charity is born of *apatheia* (perfect detachment). *Apatheia* is engendered by hope in God, hope by patience and longanimity, patience and longanimity by temperance, temperance by the fear of God, and the fear of God by adherence to his law. Finally, whoever believes in God fears his chastisement, whoever fears chastisement resists inclinations to evil, and whoever resists his passions bears patiently all evils and trials, and whoever bears suffering patiently obtains hope; hope in God frees the soul from all earthly affection, and the soul thus delivered obtains the love of God" (*Cent. de char.*, Nos. 2 and 3, col. 961).

68. St Maximus presents us with this rule, that perfect charity is only to be obtained through detachment from all

earthly things, πάσης γηινης προσπαθειας. This is what the Greek Fathers call *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια), which word signifies complete detachment and perfect mastery over natural inclinations, and a holy indifference to all things that are not God, or for God. *Apatheia*, he says, is the condition of the soul which has gained peace, and which cannot easily be drawn into sin (*Cent.*, I, No. 36, col. 968).

The soul does not arrive at this state without continuous effort. It is not, says he, after the flight from Egypt—that is to say, immediately after having forsaken sin; it is not after crossing the Red Sea—that is to say, after having been delivered from the slavery of the passions, but only after having remained in the desert that the leader of God's people could send them to find the promised land, which represents *apatheia* (col. 1428, No. 121).

One must have practised virtue very faithfully, and for a long time, to obtain this detachment of the heart which only God can bestow. "He who follows the path of virtue without ever turning aside, and possessing an upright and pious conscience, is in a state of holy indifference (*apatheia*) knows that God is present with him" (*Cent.*, II, No. 98, col. 1172).

Elsewhere St Maximus explains the virtues which most conduce to this entire control of nature: "The servitude to natural inclinations (εὐπάθεια, contrary to ἀπάθεια) is driven from the soul by fasting and prayer; the love of natural pleasures (ἡδυπάθεια) by watching and silence, the tendency to satisfy the passions (προσπάθεια) by quiet (recollection) and attention; as to *apatheia*, it is obtained by the constant thought of God (ἐκ μνήμης θεοῦ)" (col. 1416, No. 73).

"When the soul is completely freed from passions, it hastens without retracing its steps towards contemplation, and advances towards the knowledge of the Holy Trinity" (*Cent.*, No. 86, col. 980). Up to this time it has been unable to do this, for "a soul swayed by passion, παθητικός, cannot enter by the narrow gate of prayer until it has freed itself from cares" (col. 1417, No. 80).

When those who love pleasure and who are altogether earthly apply themselves to prayer they are distracted by all kinds of thoughts which croak like frogs. Those who moderate their cravings have good thoughts, which give them as much pleasure as the song of a nightingale, and they go from one to another like the birds flying from branch to branch; while those in a state of *apatheia* pray in silence and without the interruption of disturbing considerations (col. 1444, No. 180).

"*Apatheia* comprises different degrees: the removal of bad actions and of evil thoughts, the subjugation of lust and of all the interior movements of the passions, then the purification of one's own spirit which, disengaged from the representations of the imagination, and by the aid of gnosis (supernatural knowledge and contemplation) renders the soul pure and bright as a mirror in which God himself is reflected.[1] He who is purified and freed from the tyranny of his passions, who preserves his mind from the impure phantoms of the imagination, escapes from earthly things and from everything material, and attains intellectual peace that is all divine, full of joy and brightness" (col. 1281, No. 51).

"The saints have safely traversed the present world, so full of pitfalls, with firm and sure steps; to do this they had to make sense subordinate to mind, because the mind being more enlightened possesses a knowledge of different beings. And the mind itself they have kept free from all attachments and even from its natural operations, and have turned it entirely to God, in such a manner that applying all their powers to him, and becoming completely absorbed in him, they have merited an entirely spiritual union with him. Also they bear in themselves a perfect image of the Lord of heaven as far as that can be given to human beings, and attract to themselves, if one may so speak, the divine resemblance, feeling at the same time attracted towards God" (*Cent.*, V, No. 73, col. 1378).

"Holy Scripture calls this contemplation *montana*, as high as a mountain, this very lofty and spiritual contemplation of nature, which belongs to those who, losing sight of the world of sense, arrive, by the practise of virtue, at an altogether spiritual knowledge of it" (*Cent.*, II, No. 61, col. 1243).

"True and perfect contemplation requires that the soul be free from blemish and detached from all things; this is why a soul such as this goes by the name of Jerusalem, as much because of the eminent virtue it possesses as on account of its perfect knowledge, a knowledge that has nothing earthly about it, for it supposes not only the renunciation of sin and of natural affections, but also of sensible imaginations" (*Cent.*, II, No. 67, col. 1245).

69. St Maximus also shows that to obtain contemplation it is necessary to acquire virtues, particularly recollection and abnegation, and in what way they conduce to it when perfectly practised.

This is what he says about recollection: "When a man

[1] *Cf.* col 1356, No. 17.

has cast away all exterior things, he is then as if in the midst of a fire which communicates its heat. Blessed is the man who has received such a favour, who, although by nature being nothing but a little dust, becomes all inflamed with grace. . . . The soul, when interiorly recollected, no longer allows itself all sorts of idle considerations; all its thoughts are quite simple (γυμνούς). It receives divine light, which produces grace and peace" (col. 1124, Nos. 103, 104, 111). "As long as the mind cherishes the thought of God, it seeks him in contemplation" (col. 1244, No. 62).

He shows also that for him who would pray to God in a proper manner renunciation is absolutely necessary. "He who has not renounced all earthly things save what is needed for food and covering cannot possibly obtain the love of prayer" (col. 1421, No. 91).

We receive light according to our dispositions. "God makes himself known to each one according to the idea conceived of him; to those who by their holy desires are raised above all that is material, and whose entire faculties with one accord are turned towards God, he shows himself as the one God in Three Persons, and teaches them in a mystical manner both that he is and what he is. But to those who are given to earthly things he does not show himself as he is, but leaves them to their own imaginations, which represent him as like to themselves" (col. 1220, No. 95).

One must, then, overcome nature, in order that divine love may increase and prayer become easy. "Mortify the flesh by watching and fasting; recite psalms and prayers unremittingly; in this way the holy virtue of purity will enter the soul and bring with it the love of God" (col. 970, No. 45). "He who has a true love for God prays with his whole heart, without allowing himself to be distracted, but he whose heart is attached to some earthly object cannot pray like this, and therefore has no real love, for his heart is given to the things of this world" (col. 983, No. 1).

70. But what, then, is this contemplation to which the practise of virtue and complete detachment lead?

In the first place it obtains more merit than the exercise of the reasoning faculties or the laborious practise of virtue gives. The contemplative, θεωρητικός, is superior to the man of action, πρακτικός, who not being yet able to contemplate, serves his God by his obedience, labour, and efforts. "There are many who give themselves up to an active life and run in the race of virtue, but only one

gains the prize, he who aspires to reach the goal by contemplation" (col. 1433, No. 145). "When men of action pray they enter the door of the divine precepts, but contemplatives reach the court of the virtues, singing, because they return thanks, either that their bonds are broken, or because they have taken their enemies captive" (col. 1436, No. 148). "He who applies himself to active works finds in his prayer the beverage of compunction, but the contemplative imbibes from the most excellent chalice that inebriates him" (col. 1433, No. 146).

"He who applies himself to active virtues, weary of what he has to suffer, desires to die and to be with Christ, but the contemplative prefers to remain in the flesh because prayer consoles and rejoices him, and also because he may be useful to his neighbour" (col. 1437, No. 160). "Contemplation of spiritual things is a paradise on earth. The gnostic enters this paradise when he prays, as if he entered his own house; but the man of action is like a traveller who wishes to enter to see what he can find, but who cannot go in because the door is too low for his great stature," and this is doubtless due to his want of humility (col. 1440, No. 162).

"The bodily passions are like wild beasts, the passions of the soul resemble birds. The man of action can indeed protect his vine from the beasts by building a wall round it, but only the contemplative can scare away the birds" (*ibid.*, No. 163).

71. Contemplation is reserved for the intimate friends of God. "As not all who are admitted to an audience with the king dine with him, so not all who apply themselves to prayer are granted contemplation" (col. 1440, No. 168). St Maximus recognizes three degrees of prayer: "simple prayer, which is like bread, to supply beginners with refreshment; when to this is added a little contemplation, then it resembles the oil with which the body is anointed[1] (Ps. xxii, 5); lastly, when pure contemplation is practised it is like a wine of exquisite flavour, which renders those who partake of it beside themselves" (col. 1441, No. 176).

Elsewhere, alluding to the three parts of the temple, St Maximus says: "He whose mind in prayer rambles over many considerations remains without the first veil;[2]

[1] Orientals love to anoint themselves with oil. This refreshes and strengthens them.

[2] St Maximus remarks elsewhere that certain souls do not even get as far as this prayer. "It is not given to the imperfect to enter the vineyard of prayer so rich in fruit. They are like the poor who, after

he whose prayer is quite simplified enters the temple; but only he enters the holy of holies who, having silenced natural reflections and considerations, has raised himself to the consideration of that which is above all understanding and is favoured with divine light" (col. 1422, No. 102).

The holy Abbot is here speaking of an entirely simplified prayer, μονολογιστος, with a single consideration. It is this which later is called the prayer of simple attention to the presence of God. St John of the Cross, St Francis de Sales, St Jane de Chantal, have often recommended it, and have explained the practice of it. It is a contemplative and mystical prayer, but dark and quiet, and therefore differing from that prayer which abounds in brilliant light and transports of love.

"Simple prayer," says St Maximus, "is a sign that God loves the soul" (col. 1421, No. 92). "The prayer that goes with spiritual contemplation is truly the promised land, wherein flow the milk and honey of the knowledge of the providence and judgements of God. Simple prayer is like the manna in the desert; it is repugnant to those souls that remain sensual and without detachment, but to detached souls willing to be nourished with such a wretched diet it becomes pleasant and satisfying" (col. 1437, No. 156). "Silence is the curb of anger, and abstinence is the curb of unreasoning passions, while simple prayer is the curb of volatile imaginations" (col. 1440, No. 69). "As an athlete has to restrict himself to one kind of food, so the mind during prayer should content itself with one simple thought, for by so doing it becomes freed from its passions (by cutting short those reflections, preoccupations, and calculations likely to arouse the passions), and at last in this prayer it becomes entirely wrapt in God" (col. 1441, No. 178).

St Maximus clearly proves that contemplation is superior to meditation when he says: "When the soul gives itself to reflections and considerations it descends to a lower level, because the thoughts are inferior to the thinker, and distract and divide the mind; the mind, in fact, is simple, but thoughts and reflections are manifold, and are but the shape, or image, of the mind. On the other hand, when the divided soul concentrates itself it becomes unified when given to divine contemplation, because then it rises above sensible images, mental conceptions, and even, I may say, its own acts, to receive the rays of divine knowledge" (*Cent.*, V, col. 1377, No. 69).

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the harvest has been gathered, can only glean the grapes. They can only give themselves to psalmody."

"Error is the origin of division; it introduces division into the minds of its victims; on the contrary, the light of truth leads to unity; it makes those phantasms which have no existence but in the imagination to be rejected, and turns the attention to the only real and true Being. All conceptions and all images it reduces to a pure, true, and uniform knowledge, and fills the soul with a simple clear light which prevents any division" (*Cent.*, V, col. 1384, No. 82). "There are two perfect methods of pure prayer: one that of men of action, the other that of contemplatives. The most perfect prayer for the active life is that which leads to the fear of God and to holy hope: that for contemplatives proceeds from divine love and perfect purity. The sign of the first is the rejection by the mind of earthly things and a realization of the presence of God, who is indeed present, and the giving of oneself without disturbance or distraction to prayer. The sign of the second method is that, when in the fervour of prayer, the mind becomes as if enraptured with divine light, and apprehends nothing else except him who, diffusing in it his love, produces in it this light in which it receives a pure and clear knowledge concerning all that relates to him" (col. 985, No. 6). "When the contemplative is called down by natural necessities from the heights of heaven, he can say: 'What can be more admirable than the beauty of God? What more wonderful than his greatness?' There is no feeling so violent, so difficult to bear, as that which is poured forth by God into the soul when purified of all that is evil, and which makes it exclaim, 'I languish with love'" (col. 1445, No. 197). It is the divine Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and of love, who raises the soul to contemplation: "The Holy Spirit is in all things, since he contains, preserves, and governs all creatures; in all those who submit to his rule he is present to enlighten their conscience; he is present in all Christians as the author of their adoption; but as the giver of wisdom he is only in those who by their conduct inspired by God have rendered themselves worthy to possess him, and to be united to him" (col. 1209, No. 73). "The property of the gift of wisdom is an incomprehensible union with God, which, to those who are worthy of it, makes joy succeed to those ardent desires, which render man a participant of the divinity and capable of explaining to those who require it, the divine mysteries, and the divine beatitude" (col. 1276, No. 38).

St Maximus repeats that he who by his virtue has deserved to receive the knowledge which proceeds from

the Holy Spirit is said to suffer the divine action, because he has obtained this knowledge, not by his own natural efforts, but by the grace which he has received. He who has not received this knowledge which is the fruit of grace, however learned may be his language, does not know by experience the virtue of those things of which he speaks, because study by itself does not impart this knowledge (col. 1356, No. 18).

72. St Maximus does not conceal the fact that contemplatives have to undergo great trials: "The contemplative or gnostic to be proved is often allowed to be tempted by the devil, who inflicts on him all sorts of torments and trials, in order that by suffering he may be brought to understand the value of firmness and patience in adversity, rather than waste himself uselessly and vainly on things of naught" (col. 1215, No. 88).

Precious are the effects of contemplation. It purifies the mind: "The body," says St Maximus, "cannot be purified without watchings and fastings, nor the soul without mercy and truth, nor the mind without contemplation and intercourse with God" (col. 1405, No. 20). And it purifies it by freeing it from all that is material and sensible, enabling it to pray without distraction (col. 985, No. 4).

The holy Abbot has shown how *apatheia* or perfect detachment disposes the mind for contemplation, but by a happy reversion contemplation itself makes detachment easy. "He who is contemplative remains in a state of holy indifference, ἀπαθὴς, by reason of being united to God, and of having become alienated from earthly things" (col. 1381, No. 79). "Those men who are given to an active life share their thoughts between earthly cares and holy considerations, but contemplatives are thoroughly established in contempt for earthly things" (col. 1449, No. 209). "Any mind that can rise to contemplation is a real labourer, who by care and solicitude keeps the good seed free from tares, because the remembrance of God, which never leaves it, protects it. . . . Let us, then, always pray to the Lord that the salutary remembrance of him may be ever present to our minds" (*Cent.*, II, 66, col. 1245).

12. *Thalassius.*

73. We find the same doctrine in the writings of Thalassius, an abbot in Libya, and a great friend of St Maximus. We shall see how much he insists on this important point; that it is by purity of heart and by detachment that the wisdom of the Spirit of God is obtained.

"It is impossible for the soul to apply to spiritual things without having first cut off affection for sensible things" (*Cent.*, II, 41). "He will gain wisdom who benefits in three ways; by obedience to the precepts, by the knowledge of doctrine, and by faith in the Blessed Trinity" (*Cent.*, III, 28). "The soul that has renounced all attachments is enlightened by the Holy Spirit about all that forms the object of its hope" (*Cent.*, IV, 75). "The soul receives a knowledge of divine things in proportion to the degree of purity acquired" (*Cent.*, IV, 76).

"He who allows his body only what is necessary will obtain divine knowledge which will perfectly purify him" (*Cent.*, IV, 77).

"When the spirit is freed from the disturbance of the passions it is enlightened, and the light allotted to it renders it capable of contemplating real beings" *Cent.*, I, 50).[1]

74. "Make use of sensible things to rise to intellectual contemplation, and lift up your mind above all that appears to the senses" (*Cent.*, II, 26). "The mind that applies to the contemplation of real beings finds therein a solid joy" (*Cent.*, II, 46). "Of true charity is born first a knowledge of the things of this world,[2] and then follows theology, which is a grace above all to be desired" (*Cent.*, IV, 62). "A soul founded on solid faith is raised above all philosophy, and finally gains access to theology, which is defined as a profound faith and the contemplation of the unknown" (*Cent.*, IV, 80).

75. "It is holy indifference and perfect science[3] which procures peace for the soul, and he who is governed by an attraction for pleasure is incapable of obtaining it" (*Cent.*, II, 14). "The keeping of the divine commandments begets a holy indifference, and this holy indifference preserves a perfect knowledge" (*Cent.*, II, 25). "Two things lead to the promised land, the true heavenly kingdom: holy indifference, and perfect knowledge" (*Cent.*, II, 34).

[1] One must call to mind here the doctrine of St Gregory of Nyssa, quoted before, on creatures, beings of nought, and on him to whom alone the name of Being applies.

[2] Which we must learn to take at their proper value, and, consequently, to despise.

[3] We have seen that *Clement of Alexandria* designates holy indifference by the term "apathia," *ἀπάθεια*, and the perfect knowledge of God and of creatures by *gnosis*, *γνῶσις*. This is acquired by the perfect soul, thanks to the light it receives in contemplation. Thalassius here makes use of the same words, and evidently takes them in the same sense.

"It is impossible for the soul to be perfected by divine knowledge if the heart be not first enriched with virtue" (*Cent.*, II, 50).

"When the soul no longer possesses the same love, nor the same energy for virtue, the mind will no longer be enlightened so much" (*Cent.*, II, 56).

13. *St John Damascene.*

76. A few quotations from the writings of this great doctor († 754) will show what was his opinion of the mystical states:

"Why did our Lord lead his disciples up a high mountain? By a mountain the Holy Scripture designates virtue. The highest of all the virtues, the virtue that is at the summit, is charity; it is this that constitutes perfection. . . . It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that, leaving to earthly men what is earthly, we should rise above our vile bodies to that summit where charity reigns, and contemplate that which is above the sight of mortals. Indeed, he who has arrived at the highest degree of charity passes out of himself and discovers him who cannot be seen; taking his flight above the mists of the senses which oppose an obstacle to the perception of the mind, he is established in peace; he fixes his gaze on the Sun of justice, and enjoys a sight of which he never wearies. The Evangelist has added the word *seorsum*, aside, in order to show that he who wishes to pray should retire apart. Solitude is the mother of prayer, and prayer is the revelation of the divine glory.

"Therefore, when, after closing all the doors of the senses, we remain alone with God, when, escaping from all exterior turmoil and enjoying full liberty, we enter into ourselves, then do we behold clearly the kingdom of God within us."[1] (*De Transfigur. Dom.*, 10).

"He alone is truly happy who desires virtue and who exerts every faculty to acquire it; because by it he draws near to God and is spiritually united to him. This is true wisdom, a science that does not mislead, a treasure that cannot be stolen, to have attained by the generous practice of virtue the contemplation of the Creator." (*De virt. et vit.*)

In the life of Barlaam and Josaphat, formerly attributed to St John Damascene, but which appears to be of more ancient date, probably of the first half of the sixth century,

[1] This doctrine may be compared with that of St Teresa, *infra*, No. 324.

the writer imagines the following words to be uttered by a servant of God who had acquired the habit of contemplation.

"The Fathers defined prayer as the union of the soul with God; they called it an angelic exercise and the prelude of future happiness; because for them heaven consists in being united to the three divine Persons, and in contemplating them. Therefore, constancy in prayer leads a man by the hand to this knowledge of God, to this intercourse with God; it is, therefore, with good reason that it is considered as the prelude and image of this felicity.

"This, however, is not true of every method of prayer, but only of that which has God as its master and inspiration, of that which is above all that is earthly and which is united to the Lord without any intermediary.

"This is the kind of prayer that you should acquire, and in which you should compel yourself to make progress; it is that which will raise you from earth to heaven. Also you cannot make any progress without many efforts, for at first it is necessary to detach your soul from every vicious habit, to drive away all bad thoughts, to make it pure as a mirror without spot, to forget all injuries, and to put aside resentments, as this is the greatest obstacle to raising the soul to God in prayer; also to practise almsgiving and charity towards the poor, as this will lend wings to your prayer and will draw burning tears from your eyes" (*Vita Barlaam et Josaphat*, ch. xx).

77. From the quotations which have been made from the writings of the Greek Fathers—and those who search their writings will find many other texts equally conclusive[1]—it is easy to conclude that, without all the development and precision which it acquired later, the doctrine of divine union was understood by them, and that it was the same as that set forth at the beginning of this work. There is, according to them,[2] in the spiritual life, a very enviable state, which should be the object of our aspirations and petitions, a state in which the soul receives the most precious light on God and divine things.

[1] Other texts will be found in our other books, *The Mystical State*, especially in the second edition, and in yet another work in preparation, *La Piété à travers les âges*.

[2] We shall soon find St Gregory confirming our conclusions by declaring that the ancients, and he particularly names the Greeks, divided the spiritual life into three degrees, the last of which is the contemplative life: *Veteres tres vitæ ordines esse dixerunt, moralem, naturalem, et contemplativam, quas Græci vitas ethicam, physicam, theoricam nominaverunt.* See explanation, *infra*, No. 97.

Thanks to this light, it gives itself up to the contemplation of God, θεωρία, and remains united to him. This union, ἕνωσις, is especially close and sweet at the time consecrated to prayer, but it does not cease to remain afterwards. To arrive at this state in which faults are rare and the life more holy, to receive those graces which are gifts from our Lord, one must be purified from every imperfect attachment, and have made progress in the practice of virtue; then one must fix one's thoughts on God, try to gain a lofty idea of his greatness, not only by means of images and sensible representations, or of reasonings, for these leave one very far from the reality, but by means of that mysterious union communicated by himself, and which is enjoyed either in silent admiration or in transports of love.

CHAPTER III

THE FATHERS OF THE LATIN CHURCH

78. We have found in the Greek Church the first masters of the mystical life—very eminent masters. This is not a matter for wonder when we consider the glories of this Church, so illustrious in its many great saints and great doctors. Doubtless the greater number of these illustrious doctors have only touched cursorily upon the questions of high spirituality. Their principal care was to state with precision the dogmas incessantly attacked by new heresies, to defend them against pagans, to combat those disorders to which their own people were only too much addicted, without propounding a perfection beyond their power. If, even in the ages of faith, mysticism held but an inconsiderable place in Christian literature, with how much greater reason was it so in these ages of formation and struggle! It was not because its principles were unknown; the learned, skilled in research, will find many proofs of this; the examples given will suffice to convince the reader without giving him the weariness which similar repetitions would entail. It is the same in the Latin as in the Greek Church. No doubt many allusions could be found to the doctrine of mysticism among its doctors, but they have hardly treated of this question *ex professo*. The extracts to be submitted to the reader will suffice to establish their doctrine.

1. *St Ambrose.*

79. Let us begin with a short passage taken from the writings of the great Archbishop of Milan, St Ambrose:

"What do these words imply: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth'? . . . Consider the soul, which, rising above the body, renouncing all the pleasures of the senses, all the cravings of the flesh, and stripping itself of all the vain solicitudes of the world, asks most earnestly to be favoured with the gift of the divine presence, sighs for the Saviour-God, is afflicted and pines away with grief if his coming is delayed; such a soul, wounded with the wound of love, can endure no delay, but turns to the Father and asks him to send his Son, and says to him with a holy

impatience: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.'

"And it is not a single kiss that it claims; that would not satisfy its love. . . . The Scripture says of her of whom many sins were forgiven because she loved much that she did not cease to cover with kisses the feet of the Saviour.

"Therefore the soul demands many kisses in order to be enlightened with that light which imparts the divine science. This light of supernatural knowledge is indeed the kiss of the Word. The Son of God bestows his kiss on us when he enlightens our hearts, when he gives to the human understanding a knowledge of divine things—sweet sign of love, true nuptial gift, the height of joy to the soul, making it to exclaim: 'I opened my mouth and panted' (Ps. cxviii, 131). A kiss draws closer and unites those who love each other, and fills them with a deep joy. By the sacred kiss the soul of man is attached and united to the divine Word, who makes his breath and his spirit pass into it, in the same way as those who embrace each other are not content with the meeting of their lips; their hearts also are made one" (*De Isaac et Anima*, ch. iii, No. 8).

St Gregory and St Bernard perceive in this desire for the sacred kiss which is shown by the Spouse in the Canticles the desire for union and the contemplative life. Have they not borrowed this interpretation from St Ambrose?

80. In the eighth chapter of the same book the holy doctor marks the three celebrated divisions of the spiritual life, and places in the third degree, which is the state of perfection, that sacred repose which is the perfect union of the Word with the soul.

"'My brother holds me, and my brother is turned towards me'[1] (Cant. of Cant.). This idea is thrice repeated in the Canticle of Canticles. At the beginning it is said: 'My brother to me, and I to him who feedeth among the lilies, till the day break and the shadows retire.' And further: 'I to my brother and my brother to me, who feedeth among the lilies.' And finally it says: 'I to my brother, and his turning is towards me.' The first text refers to the first formation (*institutionem*) of the faithful soul, and it begins thus, 'My brother to me,' because from the moment he shows himself the soul feels the desire to be united to God. The second text concerns

[1] St Jerome has translated these passages better by substituting the word "beloved" for that of "brother" (ἀδελφιδός) employed by the Septuagint and from there handed on to the Itala.

the progress, and the third the perfection of the soul. In the first degree is received the first lesson, but as yet only shadows are seen; the Word draws near, but is not fully revealed, and the broad daylight of the Gospels has not yet appeared. In the second degree there is no longer any uncertainty nor confusion of shadows; sweet perfumes are perceived by the faithful soul. And in the third degree perfection is attained; the Word can turn and rest his head, and repose in his beloved."

81. "Let thy mercy also come upon me, O Lord; thy salvation according to thy word" (Ps. cxvii, 41). "Let us see the application of this text to the Word and to the soul. The soul of the just is the Spouse of the Word. If we desire him we should pray, and pray earnestly without recourse to idle debates and vain arguments, but turn entirely towards the Word; then suddenly we shall seem to hear his voice, and although we cannot see him we shall perceive by our interior senses the odour of the divinity. This usually takes place in the truly faithful soul—*Quod patiuntur plerumque qui bene credunt.* It is suddenly filled with the sweet perfume of grace, and recognizes that he whom it desires makes his presence felt. 'Here is he,' it says, 'whom I desire and for whom I sigh'" (*In Ps.* cxviii, *sermo* vi).

2. *St Augustine.*

81*c*. The great doctor of Hippo in several places takes pains to trace the path to be followed on the way to perfection, and this is, in his opinion, as we shall see, the contemplative and mystical state.

In his book *De quantitate animae*, ch. xxxiii, he shows the different operations of the human soul, and points out the course of its progress.

Firstly: It actuates the body and imparts life to it.

Secondly: It gives the senses the power of exercise and of the perception of material things.

Thirdly: It produces, thanks to the understanding, marvellous works, such as the skill of the artisan, the cultivation of the ground and the construction of towns; from it thoughts and reasonings emanate; it inspires eloquence, poetry, etc.

Fourthly: The soul is the principle of good actions, such as to respect and love one's neighbour, to be just and obedient to authority. In these excellent acts there is always effort and trouble.

Fifthly: The purified soul keeps firmly to the practice of virtue, and perseveres therein; then, understanding its

dignity and full of confidence, flies towards God, and seeks to contemplate the sovereign truth, which contemplation is the high and mysterious recompense of its labours.

Sixthly: The desire felt to understand the most sublime truths is the highest phase of the soul. But we must not expect to receive this favour unless we have been cured and purified of our vices. We should therefore utter the prayer of the Psalmist: *Cor mundum crea in me, Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.* The mind can never become upright unless the heart is pure, unless it is turned away from lustful thoughts and from all defilement, from perishable things.

Seventhly: The seventh and last degree consists in the sight and contemplation of the truth. It is not so much a degree as the end to which we arrive by means of the preceding degrees. What joy and happiness are in this! What a taste of the true and sovereign good! What a breath of peace and of eternity! How can it be described? Great and incomparable souls have said all that they thought they ought to say on this subject; they are those who, we may well believe, have experienced and tasted these joys. But this is what I dare to tell you, that if we follow perseveringly this path marked out for us by God, and in which we have undertaken to walk, we shall succeed, through the Word who is the Wisdom of God, in attaining to the first Cause, the Author of all things, the universal Principle; and when we really know him we shall understand that all things under the sun are vanity of vanities. . . . We all recognize the truth of the doctrines proposed for our faith, and how excellent and salutary is the education given us by our holy mother the Church. . . . This contemplation of the truth contains so much delight, purity, and sincerity, such undoubting faith, that it will seem to us that until then we have known nothing, and, in the desire to embrace all truth, death, which had formerly so many terrors, will then be desired as the greatest good.

In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (l. I, cap. 3 and 4, *P.L.*, xxxiv, col. 1253-1255) St Augustine gives a similar explanation of the degrees by which one must pass to attain perfection in following the seven beatitudes and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The first beatitude teaches humility: *Blessed are the poor in spirit;* that is to say, those who are not puffed up, who submit to the authority of God for fear of chastisement in the life to come.

From this we arrive at the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures; hence we should become docile with the piety

which will prevent us becoming intractable and headstrong, or censuring the ignorant for that which seems to us unreasonable. Then shall we begin to find out the ties by which we are bound—ties of sensual habits and of sin. In this third degree, which is that of knowledge, the soul deplores the loss of the sovereign good.

The fourth degree is difficult, for it is here that violent efforts are required to detach oneself from all that keeps one back and captivates with its dangerous charm. Here one hungers and thirsts after justice, and a great courage is required, for no one can give up what is delightful without grief.

In the fifth degree, those who persevere are advised to give up all ties, and without the help and advice of a superior it would be impossible to disentangle oneself from these obstacles, for it is a certain rule that he who is aided by someone more powerful than himself should, in his turn, help him who is weaker; so, in this way, blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

The sixth degree is that of purity of heart and conscience, and this makes it possible to contemplate the supreme Good, on whom only a pure and simple intelligence can gaze.

Finally, in the seventh place comes wisdom; that is to say, the contemplation of the truth, which renders a man peaceful and gives him a true resemblance to God. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*

In the eighth degree is a return to the first principle with which we began—that of perfection and consummation. In the first, as in the eighth degree, the kingdom of heaven is spoken of. Seven degrees lead to perfection; the eighth is that of glory.

It seems to me that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, shown us by Isaias, accord with these degrees, but in an inverted sense, because there it begins with what is most perfect, while here it begins with the inferior degrees; there it begins with wisdom and ends with fear, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:

First, Fear; second, Piety; third, Knowledge; fourth, Fortitude; fifth, Counsel; sixth, Understanding; seventh, Wisdom.

Fear is suitable to the humble, to whom applies the axiom *Blessed are the poor in spirit;* that is to say, those who are not puffed up with pride.

Piety suits the gentle, for those who seek piously are respecters of Holy Scripture, and do not discredit what

they cannot as yet understand; they do not resist, and therefore are meek; hence the maxim *Blessed are the meek.*

Knowledge is for those who weep; they have learnt, in studying Holy Scripture, the evils which enchained them and which in their ignorance they mistook for good; hence the beatitude *Blessed are they that mourn.*

Strength or fortitude suits those who hunger and thirst, because, moved by the desire of good things, they labour and endeavour to strip themselves of the love of those that are earthly and material; hence the principle *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice.*

Counsel is for the merciful, for the way to escape many evils is to forgive all who have offended us, in order to obtain pardon ourselves, and to help others according to our power and opportunity, as we wish to be helped in our necessities; for *Blessed are the merciful.*

Understanding belongs to those who are pure of heart. It is necessary that the soul's eye be purified to see what the bodily eyes cannot behold, nor the ears hear, nor the heart of man conceive. Therefore, *Blessed are the clean of heart.*

Wisdom characterizes the peaceful, in whom all is well regulated, and there is no longer any feeling of revolt against reason, but all is in subjection to the soul which is itself subject to God. So *Blessed are the peacemakers.*

Elsewhere the holy doctor shows us the labours of the active life in preparation for the joys of the contemplative life. This he sets forth in his book *De consensu Evangelistarum* (l. I, cap. 5; *P.L.*, t. XXXIV, col. 1045).

Two kinds of virtue are proposed to the human soul—the first active, the second contemplative. By the first the soul makes progress; by the second attains. The active way is that of labour, and is undertaken to purify the heart to enable it to see God. The contemplative way is rest and the contemplation of God. The first consists in fulfilling the precepts of this mortal life, the second in the science of life eternal. In the first, therefore, is labour, in the second repose; the first is a struggle to be freed from sin, the second enjoys the light given to purified hearts. . . .

If we take notice we shall understand that the three (first) evangelists, who have narrated with the greatest amplitude the temporal works of our Lord, and have passed on the lessons he gave for the direction of the present life, have treated of the active virtues; but John, who relates fewer of our Saviour's actions, on the contrary, repeats with greater care and amplitude his words, especially those concerning the unity of the Trinity

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and the happiness of eternal life, having particularly in view the recommendation of the contemplative virtues.

81*b*. St Augustine has several times described the states that are manifestly mystical. In his book against Faustus (l. XII, cap. xlii, *P.L.*, t. XLII, col. 276), commenting on the words of the prophecy of Juda—*Fulgentis oculi ejus a vino*—he says: "His eyes are more beautiful than wine. Those to whom it has been given to lose sight of inferior and temporal things in the holy inebrity of the soul, for the contemplation of the eternal light of wisdom, know the meaning of these words."

"Seek God himself," says elsewhere the holy doctor, "and he will hear you; and while you are still speaking he will say: 'Here I am.' What does this mean? 'I am here; what do you want of me? All that I can give is not equal to myself; take possession of me then, enjoy me, hold me in your embrace. You cannot as yet do this completely, but attain me by faith, and you will be united to me. It is God who tells you this'" (*Enarr. in ps.* 33, v. 5).

In his book of *Confessions* (l. X, ch. xl) he makes this confidence: "Of all the things that pass through my mind, guided by thy divine light, I find only thee, O my God, where my soul can be in safety. It is in thee that I desire to gather together all my thoughts, scattered among so many objects, that they may remain thus for ever. Sometimes thou dost fill me with such marvellous sweetness, I experience feelings so extraordinary that if they became still more perfect they would surpass all that could be felt here below. But soon, falling back under the weight of my miseries, and drawn away afresh by the course of human things, I am enchained, I shed tears, and am powerless to break my fetters, so great is the force of habit."

It is again a mystical state in which we find the great doctor in that famous scene at Ostia which he has so well described, where he and St Monica converse on the beauties of heaven.

"As the result of our conversation had brought us to the conclusion that the pleasures of the senses, however keen and seductive they may be, not only cannot be compared to the delights of that other life, but are not worthy to be compared to them, we felt ourselves inflamed and excited with a more lively fervour towards those joys, reviewing all material objects one after another, till we came to the heavens themselves, from which the sun, moon, and stars shed their light on the world. Thus we continued,

plunging ever more deeply into the abyss, thinking of thee, speaking of thee, and admiring thy works. Coming to our souls, we ascended to that region of inexhaustible abundance where thou dost nourish Israel eternally with the food of truth, where life is wisdom itself, to which all that exists owes its existence, and not only all that exists, but all that has existed or will exist; while wisdom itself was not made, but exists now as it always was and always will be, or, to speak more correctly, it has never been and will not be, but only *is*, because it is eternal; and because to have been, or to become, is not to be eternal.

"While we were speaking, and ardently longing for that heavenly country, our hearts seemed to open wide to these delights; but we sighed because we had not yet the complete enjoyment of them; and, leaving here the first-fruits of the spirit, we desended once more to the sound of our voices, which has a beginning and an end; but what word is like our Lord, thy Word, who exists in himself without growing old, and who renews all things" (*Conf.* IX, 10).

3. *Cassian.*

82. St Ambrose and St Augustine lived in the fourth century. In the following century appeared Cassian, a writer greatly renowned for spirituality, whose works remained classics for many centuries. St Benedict recommended his religious to read the *Conferences*. St Thomas usually kept them on his work-table and for many generations they were the ordinary manual, the current literature for spiritual reading. The giver of the *Conferences*, the *collator*, as he was called, well merited this repute. In fact, Cassian was not only a man of science, but of a very holy life. He was a disciple of St John Chrysostom, who conferred on him the diaconate. Desirous of studying deeply the science of the saints, and of beholding those great models of virtue, the Fathers of the Desert, he undertook a long journey to the most distant solitudes of Egypt, wherein they then dwelt. He went later to Marseilles, where he settled and founded a monastery for men and another for women. He had under his direction nearly five thousand monks, and gave them a Rule which was followed by many monasteries in Gaul until the adoption of the Rule of St Benedict.

83. In his Eleventh Conference (ch. vii) Cassian indicates the three degrees of the spiritual life, and characterizes them as, according to Fénélon, did nearly all the Fathers—distinguishing first slaves guided by fear,

secondly mercenaries by interest, and lastly children by love. But it is from his Ninth and Tenth Conferences that we extract the mystical doctrine of this celebrated writer.

(1) *Method for the attainment of perfect prayer.*

84. According to Cassian, the goal of the spiritual life, and the end for which all should strive who apply themselves to it, is perfect prayer, divine contemplation,[1] which results in a constant and almost uninterrupted intercourse with God.

The whole aim of the solitary and his highest perfection consists in never interrupting his prayer, and in possessing, as far as human frailty permits, an immovable peace in the soul and an inviolable purity of heart. It is something so precious that we should endeavour to procure it by every toil of the body and by the breaking of the spirit, and there is an intimate and necessary connection between these two things[2] (Ninth Conference, 12).

85. We shall see how Cassian describes this perfect prayer; let us examine by what means it may be attained.

The first is the practice of virtue. Withal, Cassian very justly remarks (ch. i): "There is a mutual bond between the two things; they are inseparably connected, for, as the whole edifice of virtue is only raised to mount to the perfection of prayer, so, if prayer does not preserve this edifice, nor sustain it in every part by linking and uniting them together, it cannot remain firm and solid, nor subsist for long without falling. This steady and constant prayer cannot be acquired without virtue, neither can virtue, which is its foundation, be acquired in perfection without prayer. This is why we cannot speak about prayer nor treat all at once of its principal and final end, which can only be attained by the perfection of all the other virtues, if we do not examine first what ought to be rejected or practised to obtain it, if, according to the words of the Gospel, we do not calculate exactly all that is required for the construction of such a lofty and sublime spiritual tower."

[1] "What is that treasure to obtain which everything should be sacrificed? . . . This one unique thing is the contemplation of God. . . . However good and useful the virtues of the saints have been for this present life and also for life eternal, nevertheless, they seem paltry and negligible when compared to divine contemplation" (Twenty-third Conference). If Cassian ranks contemplation so highly, it is evidently because he recognizes in it the perfect exercise of divine love.

[2] We generally borrow from the French translation of Saligny, Lyons, 1687.—See also the *Conferences de Cassien*, translated by Cartier, and the recent translation of Dom Pichery.

86. (Chapter ii): "In order, therefore, to pray with due fervour and purity, what I am about to say must be observed most carefully. In the first place, all care of the body must be retrenched; all kinds of business must be set aside, and instead of harassing the mind with fresh matters, even those that are past must not be allowed to occupy the memory. We must refrain from backbiting, not speak much, and avoid buffoonery and the slightest approach to anger or sadness; also we must suppress all the concupiscence of the flesh, and every encouragement to avarice. . . . After having destroyed all these vices . . . the foundation of a profound humility must be laid . . . and all the other virtues thereafter established. The mind must be prevented from wasting itself with idle thoughts, so that little by little it may be raised to the contemplation of God and to the consideration of heavenly things.[1] For all that we have had in our minds before the time of prayer will naturally return to our memory when we pray. This is why what we desire to be when we pray is what we ought to be before prayer. The state in which we are then is the natural sequence of the state in which we were before.

"Let us endeavour, therefore, before the hour of prayer, to banish from our hearts anything that we do not wish to be distracted with during prayer, in order to fulfil the precept of the Apostle—'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. v, 17)—and that which he says elsewhere: 'I will therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up pure hands, without anger and contention' (1 Tim. ii, 8). This is, indeed, what we could never do if our souls were not first purified from all contagion of vice, and if, occupied in acquiring those virtues which are our natural inheritance, we did not apply ourselves to the continual contemplation of God Almighty."

87. The wandering of the mind, then, is the great obstacle to prayer. As Cassian says elsewhere, "there are three things that are particularly adapted for checking the wandering of the mind; these are watching, meditation, and prayer. In applying ourselves faithfully and generously to these we become firm and steadfast. Nevertheless, manual labour must constantly be added, not for our own gain, but for the holy use of the monastery, so that by thus retrenching all the cares of life we may fix our attention on the accomplishment of this maxim of St Paul: 'Pray without ceasing'" (Tenth Conference, ch. xiii).

[1] *Ut ita paulatim ad contemplationem Dei ac spiritalis intuitus incipiat sublimari.*

88. "It is not enough that we do nothing grossly or visibly bad to recognize that we are not sickening with the fever of worldliness . . . but we must also reject with a firm and inflexible resolve even what seems to us possible to do legitimately if it could be hidden under a specious pretext. In truth these little sophistries which seem so slight, and into which persons of our condition so easily allow themselves to fall, nevertheless occupy and weigh upon the mind as much as the great affairs by which worldly people are as though possessed and intoxicated. These trifles prevent a religious having such freedom and liberty of mind as to be able to think only of God and always to sigh for him; and, indeed, ought not a solitary to regard as fatal anything that can separate him even for a moment from the only and sovereign Good?

"When our souls are established in this peace and entirely freed from all the enticements of carnal passion, and when our whole study is to be entirely attached to God, then shall we accomplish St Paul's precept: 'Pray without ceasing,' lifting up pure hands, without anger or contention. This perfect purity of the soul stifles all that is sensual, so that, becoming entirely spiritual and like the angels, and completely changed from the earthly nature of former times, all that it understands, says, or does becomes a pure and very true prayer" (Ninth Conference, ch. v).

89. Thus, therefore, purity of heart, detachment from all affection, preoccupation, and idle thought, and from every tie, are the great means for attaining perfect prayer and the contemplation of the Divinity.

"In proportion to its innate purity is the elevation of the soul in prayer: the more it withdraws from the sight and recollection of earthly and sensible things, the greater will become its purity, and the better will it be able to see with its inner sight Jesus, either still humbled in his mortal body, or glorified and coming in the majesty of his glory.

"They only who have left all earthly things and base thoughts, to climb the mountain of solitude with him, can contemplate with pure eyes his divinity. There, Jesus Christ, having set them free from the tumult of their passions, and separated them from the contamination of vice, establishes them in a living faith, and raises them to the highest pitch of virtue, where they see openly the glory and splendour of his face with those spiritual eyes which have been purified to contemplate him. This does not mean that Jesus hides himself from those who dwell in towns and villages, meaning those who live active lives and are engaged in works of charity, but to them he does not

show himself with the same dazzling glory and majesty as to those who, like St Peter, St James, and St John, climb up the mountain of virtues. Thus also did he appear to Moses and to Eli in deep solitude.

"Jesus Christ has in his own person given us an example of perfect purity. Although the inexhaustible source of all sanctity, and having no need, as we have, of retirement and solitude to acquire it, because, being purity itself, he could not suffer the least diminution thereof from intercourse with men, whom he, on the contrary, purifies and sanctifies when he pleases, he nevertheless retired alone on the mountain to pray. He would teach us by this to withdraw as he did from the bustle and confusion of the world when we wish to offer perfect prayer and the pure affections of our hearts to God. In this way even in this mortal life we may enjoy a certain degree of that sovereign beatitude promised to the saints in heaven, and regard God as our all in all. . . .

"Our whole perfection consists, therefore, in stripping our souls daily of all that is earthly and carnal and lifting them constantly more and more towards spiritual things until every action and thought and all the movements of the heart become a constant prayer" (Tenth Conference, ch. v).

90. To these means, which may be termed negative because they serve above all to remove obstacles, Cassian adds another, which draws down the grace of prayer and forms the habit of union with God in love. This is the practice of ejaculatory prayer.

Let us listen to the question put by Germanus, the friend and companion of Cassian, to the Abbot Isaac, and the answer he received.[1] "Father," said Abbot Germanus, "certainly your last Conference surprised us very much, but this one is still more astounding. Indeed, the more we feel encouraged by your discourse to sigh after so great a happiness, the more cast down and hopeless do we become, seeing no means of arriving at this sublime state.

"It seems to me, Father, that every profession and every art, to attain its perfection, ought to begin by some easy and simple method, so that the first lessons should be like milk, to nourish and strengthen little by little, and to be gradually inculcated without trouble until the final degree of the art is reached in its highest perfection. How, for instance, could a child pronounce syllables and arrange words if he had not first learnt his letters? . . .

[1] In his *Conferences* Cassian did but record the lessons he had received from the Fathers of the desert.

We believe, Father, that it must be the same with this divine art which teaches us to adhere inseparably to God; it must also have its principles and groundwork, which must first be raised and well strengthened in order that this spiritual edifice may be raised to the highest perfection. Also, if you will permit me to tell you our thoughts, although very imperfect, we believed that for this groundwork there should be some object, some idea to fill our memory and to help us to realize the presence of God, and to keep in it always, and then to try to fix this memory and thought of God. Is not this, in truth, in what perfection consists?

"This is why we desire to understand this way of seeing God, of retaining him within us, so that, if sometimes the thought should escape from us, we might be able quickly to recall it, and to make it our own without difficulty. For it sometimes happens that after having been for a long while distracted in prayer, when we return to ourselves as if from a profound slumber, and try to find some means of recalling the recollection of God which had become quite stifled in us, this lengthy search fatigues us, and, before having even recovered our first thoughts, our efforts and attention relax and are dispersed without leaving in our minds anything spiritual to feed upon. It can be seen that we only fall into this state of disorder and confusion for want of a fixed and settled object to which we can at once recall our minds and make them return as to a safe and tranquil port after their wanderings on the way."

The answer of Abbot Isaac:

"This request that you make, so detailed and so spiritual, is a sign that you are not very far from perfection. This matter is hardly to be understood or known, or even the difficulties you speak of encountered in it, save after spending much time and making many efforts to penetrate it. One must have led for a long time a strict life according to rule before having the boldness to knock at the door of this divine purity, and to experience an ardent desire to possess it. From what you tell me, I discover that not only you have already arrived, as it were, at the door of this excellent prayer, but that you have even entered and have learnt by experience a great deal of that which it hides in the most secret and impenetrable manner; also I hope that I shall not find it very difficult with the help of God's grace to introduce you even into its innermost sanctuary, and you will have no trouble in contemplating therein those things that we will endeavour to set before you.

"This is the formula of that divine art that you wish to learn, a formula upon which every solitary who aims at a constant recollection of God should accustom himself to meditate, driving away all the idle thoughts that might distract his mind; indeed, it would be impossible to drive them away and keep guard properly unless he were entirely free and disengaged from all the cares and solicitudes of the body. It is a secret that has been left to us by a very limited number of the most ancient of our Fathers, and which we pass on only to the few persons who have an ardent desire for it. The formula, then, that you should continually bear in mind in order to keep always in the presence and recollection of God is this verse of the psalm: 'Incline unto mine aid, O God; O Lord, make haste to help me. . . .' This verse has been admirably chosen as suitable to every state and to all those different temptations to which we are exposed in this life. . . . He who is slothful or sad or weary or overwhelmed with trouble will find in this verse a salutary remedy in considering that he whom he invokes is the witness of all his combats, and that he will never forsake those who pray to him with humble confidence. . . ."

Cassian goes on to show how this appeal to God is opportune in every circumstance, placing as it does the soul in the lowly and suppliant attitude suitable to it (Tenth Conference, ch. vii, viii, xi).

(2) *A description of perfect prayer.*

91. The reader already perceives, by the quotations we have given, what, according to the author of *Conferences*, this perfect prayer is which he considers so important, and at which the faithful should aim as the end of all their efforts. Before attaining it he will practise other prayers which Cassian then describes and which are fervent affective prayers. Of these Cassian distinguishes four (Ninth Conference, ch. viii and following). The first consists in acts of supplication and asking pardon for sins committed. The second is that of souls who have made some progress; it consists of protestations of fidelity to God, good resolutions, and ardent longings after virtue. In the third, moved with compassion for others, the faithful soul offers many prayers for them. Finally, the fourth consists in thanksgivings for the divine benefits and favours.

Usually these different kinds of prayer follow each other.

The first rules at the beginning of the spiritual life, then the second becomes more frequent, and so on with the other two. When these different stages have been passed, the soul becomes accustomed to change easily from one to the other (ch. xiv).

92. Prayer, having become more and more fervent, ends by becoming "that prayer all fire that can neither be understood by thought or expressed by words" (Ninth Conference, ch. xiv).

This prayer, which follows the preceding four, "is formed by the simple contemplation of God,[1] and by the fervour of such burning charity that, being as though melted and engulfed in the love felt for God, casting itself on his breast, to enter therein and lose itself, the soul speaks to him with an altogether divine familiarity, and converses with him freely as with a father. The prayer taught us by Jesus Christ shows from the first word that we ought to strive for this state. 'Our Father,' he says; therefore, as long as we recognize and confess with our own lips that God, the Lord of the whole universe, is our Father, we also declare that from slaves we have become the adopted children of God.

"When we have been raised to and established in this sublime state of children of God we feel ourselves at once inflamed with that holy desire which all his true children have, so that, no longer occupied with our own interests, we seek only the honour and glory of our Father" (Ninth Conference, ch. xviii).

93. How the soul enters into this state of prayer and what feelings it experiences therein Cassian now tells us:

"What man is there, however experienced he may be, who is capable of explaining the different kinds and diverse causes of these ineffable spiritual conceptions which inflame his soul and make him form such pure and fervent prayers? I give you here as many as God has given me grace to remember, as an example. Often while reciting a verse of a psalm we find ourselves suddenly carried away by a prayer that is all fire. Sometimes the voice of one of the brethren, which is clear and edifying, makes us pass from the drowsiness in which we were, to apply ourselves fervently to prayer.

"We recognize also that the solemn and recollected chanting of the psalms in church gives fervour to those who are present. Often also the exhortations and spiritual

[1] *Contemplatione Dei solius et charitatis ardore formatur, per quam mens in illius dilectionem resoluta atque rejecta familiarissime Deo colloquitur.*

conversation of a man of God awaken desponding souls and inspire them with a fresh ardour for prayer. Occasionally even the death of one of the brethren or of someone whom we love will inspire us with a great compunction. The recollection of our past lukewarmness and negligence also inspires us sometimes with a holy and extraordinary fervour. So each can see by what little I have said that God has an infinite number of ways to arouse us, when he pleases, from our slothfulness, and to renew in us by his grace a spirit of fervour" (Ninth Conference, ch. xxv).

94. "But it is equally difficult to relate all the ways by which this compunction will manifest itself, hidden as it is in the centre of the heart. Very often it diffuses itself with an ineffable joy and in transports of a quite divine happiness, so that the cries of joy can no longer be contained, but bear to the neighbouring cells of our brethren an idea of the effects of the ecstasies that overwhelm us. Occasionally, on the contrary, our whole soul is imprisoned and swallowed up in the deepest silence; the admiration we feel for what we see and experience deadens our voice and prevents all speech; the mind in amazement holds all the senses in suspense, and only sighs can express to God the fervour of our desires. At other times we feel ourselves pierced with a compunction and a sorrow so deep that the only outlet for it is by a great outburst of tears" (Ninth Conference, ch. xxvi).

"But in order to make you understand in what true prayer consists, I can only repeat, not my own experiences, but those of the blessed Antony. We have seen him so rapt in prayer that sometimes, having passed the night in ecstasy, the great fervour of his soul made him rebuke the sun for rising, saying: 'Sun, how can you be so inopportune? Why do you stop me? You only seem to rise to deprive me of my true light'" (Ninth Conference, ch. xxx).

95. Finally, and with this last page, we will describe the effect of this kind of prayer, which is the closest union of the soul with God:

"Then will be perfectly accomplished our Saviour's prayer to his Father for his disciples: 'Father, I pray that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them; that they also may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us.' This prayer of our Saviour, which cannot fail of its effect, will be verified in us when this perfect love, with which God has first loved us, shall have entered the very centre of our hearts, and we love him even as he loves us.

"This will only happen when all that we love, all that we desire or seek or hope for, all that we think, all that we see, all that we say will be only God, when that unity of the Father with the Son, and of the Son with the Father, will take full possession of our hearts and souls; that will be when the love we have for him becomes continual and unchanging, like that pure and eternal love which he has for us. Thus, remaining ever united to him, and having all our hopes, our thoughts, and words directed to him and in him, we shall arrive at that sublime state in which our Saviour desires to see us established when he says in the same prayer: 'That they may be one, as we also are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. . . . Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me.' This, therefore, is the end that the solitary should propose to himself, to this he should bend the whole power of his mind—to prepare himself, even in this mortal body, for the possession of an image of eternal happiness, and to begin to taste in a vessel of earth and clay the firstfruits and pledge of that glory and that divine life which he hopes for in heaven" (Tenth Conference, ch. vi).

4. *St Gregory the Great.*

96. In St Gregory (540-604) we find unquestionably one of the greatest personalities of the Papacy. The historians tell us that no other Pope has ever displayed a zeal more wide and fruitful. He lived in a very troubled time, was almost always ill, but nevertheless not one of his predecessors or successors has executed more numerous holy works. He was endowed with all gifts, was an extraordinary administrator, and also an eminent doctor, and his sanctity equalled his knowledge and talent for government. He retained on the throne those habits of piety that had been formed in the cloister, and remained a simple Benedictine among all the important affairs confided to him by Sovereign Pontiffs, as, later, when he had himself to take in hand the government of the church.

In this summary of the history of mystical theology an important place is due to him, as much for his great worth as because he was one of the favourite authors of the Middle Ages. It was from his works that St Thomas and the other doctors drew their doctrine on contemplation, and they were accustomed, on this question, to appeal to his authority. In the time of St Teresa also he was much

read; the saint declares that she was acquainted with his works,[1] which can be said to have been classics for a lengthy period.

(1) *The contemplative life, third degree of the spiritual life.*

97. Our author (*Super Cantica, Proëmium*, No. 9) recognizes the three degrees of the spiritual life, and declares that he takes this division from the Greeks. This is the classical division that we have already encountered. According to him, the three books of Solomon are analogous to these three different divisions.

In the first degree the habits are regulated and an endeavour is made to conform the conduct to the divine precepts. This is morality in practice; and the Book of Proverbs contains its principles. In the second degree the knowledge of created things is acquired and their vanity and nothingness discovered; the Book of Ecclesiastes suits this second degree. The third degree is the contemplative life, which is described in the Canticle of Canticles. "In this are aspirations for the coming and the sight of the Lord, and the Spouse cries: 'Come from Libanus, come!'

"The study of natural objects cannot lead to perfection unless the moral life is first observed; this is why Ecclesiastes only follows Proverbs. Finally, contemplation of heavenly things can only be enjoyed when the things of earth have been cast aside; this is why the Canticle comes after Ecclesiastes. It is necessary, therefore, before all, to regulate the habits, then to look on all existing things as though they had no being, and lastly, by a simple glance, to contemplate hidden and heavenly things. Consequently in these three books there is a spiritual ladder to ascend to contemplation, for they teach us first to conduct ourselves well in this world, then to despise all that the world esteems, and finally to contemplate the secret and hidden beauty of God" (cf. *Moralia*, l. XXIV, ch. xi).

[1] The reader will certainly be struck with the conformity in doctrine of these two great saints on perfection and contemplation. In the Convent of the Incarnation at Avila they still possess the copy used by the saint and annotated with her own hand. The learned have raised doubts of the authenticity of some of the works which will be quoted—the commentaries on the Books of Kings and on the Canticle—but the doctrine we find therein is in perfect harmony with that in the uncontested works of the holy Doctor; the author is undoubtedly a disciple who faithfully follows the teachings of the Master, and these books are certainly of a venerable antiquity and authorized witnesses of the traditional doctrine.

98. The contemplative life is not only a life in which the soul, more enlightened, apprehends better the divine beauty; it is a life all love; fear has given place to charity, to an ardent charity.

"Whoever fears God is already under the yoke of the Lord; but as long as he fears he has made but little progress, for the farther he advances on the way that leads to God, the farther removed is he from fear, which is a punishment, and the nearer he approaches to love, which is a favour. Let us therefore consider that which takes place in every faithful soul devoured with an incessant craving to behold the heavenly Spouse. It fixes its eyes on him and contemplates his greatness, which it can only do very imperfectly here below, and it is wounded (*compungitur*) with his love; this wound (*compunctio*), the result of charity, is inflamed by desire, and is, so to say, the kiss of the soul.

"There are many who fear, and to whom God grants the grace to lead a virtuous life, but who have not received the divine kiss because they have not been wounded with the love of God. Let him who desires to be wounded with the love of God and sighs after the contemplation of his divine Spouse say: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth'" (*In Cant.*, ch. i, 5).

99. In his *Moralia* (l. XXII, ch. xx, No. 50) the holy doctor well indicates this gradation in virtue. First, God bestows the gift of conversion; then that of refraining from all disorders, avoiding all divergence, all bad actions; and later all the passions become deadened; and finally, when the perfection of good works has been attained, one arrives at contemplation.

100. When the soul has arrived at this perfection, continual prayer becomes possible. "'Pray without ceasing.' Only the perfect can do this, for to pray without ceasing is to keep oneself always before God as a suppliant; he who remains weak and imperfect often loses sight of God, even in the midst of his prayer" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 14).

101. According to St Gregory, therefore, as we can see, the life of those who are perfect is the contemplative life; for them contemplation is the crown of the spiritual life.

We are going to compare and to set before the reader the passages which apply to contemplation. Then will be better understood what are St Gregory's real views. Also it will be seen how he describes the perfect or contemplative life, and indicates the means by which it can be attained.

(2) *Contemplation as gift and recompense.*

102. In the first place, the holy Pontiff acknowledges that contemplation does not result from our own efforts. God bestows it when he pleases; it is a gift of his goodness. But we can and ought to dispose ourselves to receive this favour from God. Those who place obstacles in the way are many, and this is the real reason, according to him, why contemplation is not more frequent. As long as a Christian does not correct his faults and remains very imperfect he is not ready for contemplation. When, thanks to his efforts, these obstacles have been removed and his soul properly disposed to receive this favour, it will not be denied to him. God can choose his own time and show thus that he is master of his gifts; but at the moment determined upon he will visit his servant and bestow on him this precious favour.

These, then, are two fundamental points which cannot be too much insisted upon: Contemplation is a gratuitous gift depending on the divine pleasure; nevertheless, we can, and we ought, to dispose ourselves to receive it.

103. Listen to our author: " 'Elcana went up out of his city upon the appointed days to adore and to offer sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts in Silo' (*I Reg.*, i, 3). Elcana went up on the *appointed* days because he advanced step by step towards the light of heavenly contemplation. What are these manifestations of interior light, if not the days of the faithful soul; these days are *appointed* because in the progress of the spiritual life everything is regulated by the divine will; these days, then, are *appointed* because we are not admitted to the bright light of contemplation when it pleases us, but when it pleases God to raise us to it. Sometimes, therefore, God introduces us into this light, and sometimes he leaves us in the darkness, which is proper to human beings. He raises us, then, on appointed days because, instead of always giving the sweetness of interior light, he only bestows it at the times fixed by his wisdom. These days are truly ours, because it is we who are admitted to this admirable light when the brightness of this hidden glory is manifested to us; but these days are appointed, because it depends on the good pleasure of God, and not on our own efforts, whether we enjoy this light or not. Does it not frequently happen that even after earnest supplications, frequent sighs, silent prayer to obtain this interior light, yet it is not granted to us? And often, on the contrary, when we have done nothing to obtain it, suddenly grace takes hold of us and raises

us from the depths of our misèry to higher regions, and without our having even the thought of it, its splendours are revealed to us. . . ." (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 4).

104. The efforts we make to keep holy thoughts in our souls are not without merit, but they do not produce great effects unless God adds the interior light of contemplation.

"Of one kind are the days when we go up like Elcana to adore and to offer sacrifice;[1] of another the day, but just dawned, on which we offer the sacrifice. In fact, when by our own efforts we apply ourselves to meditation on divine things, these are the appointed days (*statuti dies*) when we go up of ourselves; then, indeed, we receive certain spiritual light, and we obtain other lights for ourselves, and thus we raise ourselves to a certain height above the valley of humanity. But without divine grace of what avail are these meditations? They can neither inspire us with a real fear nor procure divine consolations; these are the days when we go up to adore and to sacrifice, but there is neither adoration nor sacrifice. Then another day dawns when we sacrifice, because we are unexpectedly enlightened by grace, and at the sight of the beauty of God we are filled with ineffable love. This is not one of the days of which we have just spoken, but it comes after them, for if by our own efforts we cannot procure for ourselves these favours of grace, yet they would never be given to us if we did not apply ourselves with the greatest care to daily meditation, spiritual reading, and prayer, and if we did not thoroughly examine those truths that are within our reach" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 8).

105. And even in this case contemplation remains a favour. "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve thee; in the seventh year he shall go out free for nothing (Exod. xxi). What does this number six signify if not the perfection of the active life, and the number seven if not the contemplative? He serves, therefore, six years, and the seventh he becomes free; he who perfectly fulfils the duties of the active life and is promoted to the liberty of the contemplative life. And take notice that he obtains this liberty gratuitously. In fact, those who have accomplished all their task should acknowledge that they are unprofitable servants, the contemplative life being a pure gift to them" (*Hom. III, In Ez.*, No. 10).

106. The Lord does not usually refuse this favour to the

[1] To adore, as has been said (No. 7), is to render to the divine Omnipotence the homage of a profound submission: to sacrifice is to be filled with the ineffable sweetness and light of contemplation.

well disposed, to those, for example, who have faithfully practised the greatest virtue.

"I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the harts of the fields, that you stir not up nor make the beloved to awake, till she please.

"Roes and harts, according to the law, were looked upon as clean animals. What do we understand by these roes and harts if not faith, hope, and charity? If we retain these virtues in all their purity, we climb, thanks to them, the high mountains of contemplation" (*In Cant.*, ch. ii, No. 8).

This is why St Gregory calls the contemplative life the third and last stage of the spiritual life; he teaches that when the perfection of good works has been attained we shall arrive at contemplation.[1]

(3) *Methods of arriving at contemplation.*

107. But let us see by what means we can arrive at contemplation; the holy author's doctrine will stand out very plainly, and we shall see better how he would have everyone work to remove obstacles, and to bring about, by an irreproachable life, so great a favour.

The first condition is to desire contemplation ardently; it is necessary that the ministers of the sacred Gospel should strive to arouse this desire in the hearts of the faithful. "As to those who aspire to the purity of the contemplative life, they must derive from their spiritual reading neither common nor vulgar lessons, but teachings that are elevated and perfect, so that, inflamed with desire of the great benefits proposed to them, they should make the most generous efforts to obtain them" (*In I Reg.*, l. III, ch. iv, No. 25).

That which makes the favour of contemplation so desirable is that it obtains us such great blessings.

"It is said of Elcana the Ephraimite, the figure of every faithful soul, that he adored and sacrificed, because the faithful desire to rise to the contemplation of divine things, so that, fortified in spirit, they can spurn underfoot all that is sensual, and receive the fulness of divine delights" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 7).

And this desire for contemplation should be accompanied by confidence, because the desire shows the calling to it.

"Anna wept and refused all nourishment. These tears

[1] *Percepta namque perfectione operis, ad contemplationem venitur* (*Moralia*, in Job xxxi, v, 34, l. II, ch. xvi, No. 50).

indicate an ardent desire for divine contemplation. Anna is questioned by her husband as to the cause of her tears and sadness. It is as though he said to her: 'Why do you grieve that you have not obtained perfect contemplation? If, now that you have advanced, it is refused to you, you will obtain it when you have made more progress.' And, therefore, she who, persecuted by her rival, refused to eat, allowed herself to be comforted by her husband and accepted food. They, therefore, who yield to wise counsel and renounce the things of earth, already possess, in hope, if not in reality, perfect contemplation" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 12).

108. The remote preparation for contemplation must be distinguished from that which is proximate. The remote preparation consists in leading a virtuous life: "If one does not begin with the practice of good works, one will never obtain the light of divine contemplation. And our Lord says: 'If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.' Our Lord promises, then, to manifest himself, but only to those who love him; and he adds that he loves those who keep his commandments, clearly showing by this that he only grants the light of hidden contemplation as a recompense for a virtuous life" (*In I Reg.*, l. III, ch. iv, No. 18).

"There are none who have attained contemplation except by the labours of an active life" (*In I Reg.*, l. V, ch. iv, No. 67).

"Holy preachers mention two kinds of life—the active and contemplative—for it is through good works that we arrive at contemplation" (*Hom. III in Ez.*, No. 9).

"The faithful who have overcome the shameful propensities of the flesh should zealously give themselves to the practice of good works; and whosoever has enlarged his soul in this way should strive to dilate it still more by the interior exercise of contemplation. He who neglects good works for contemplation, or gives the second place to contemplation for love of good works, is not a perfect minister of the Holy Word" (*Mor.*, l. VI, ch. xxxvii).

109. Among the virtues which are a preparation for contemplation, humility is the chief. "The infant Samuel was called by the Lord, because it is to the humble and obedient that divine secrets are communicated, their humility obtaining them the grace of contemplation that is lost by the pride of preachers who are full of self-love" (*In I Reg.*, l. II, ch. iv, No. 6).

"It is in order to prevent us giving way to presumption

that Holy Scripture places adoration before sacrifice. 'Elcana adored and sacrificed' (*I Reg.*, i, 3). This is the order followed by the contemplative; he begins with fear. It is fear that purifies the faithful and renders them able to contemplate the divine glory. The more respect and fear they feel in the presence of the majesty of God, the more purified do they become and the more capable of enjoying the bright rays of the divine light."

"We see in the way the Ephraimite acted, the tracing of a line of conduct for us who are striving for perfection. We desire to become inundated with streams from the glory of the supreme Majesty, but we ought first to abase our pride in respectful fear. . . .

"Occasionally, however, it happens that God deigns to fill us with so great a sweetness that we no longer feel this great fear. . . . Does it not often happen that, by God's grace, we are raised to divine contemplation without the least mixture of any thought of his dreadful judgements?" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 8).

"'The Bethsamites were reaping wheat in the valley' (*I Reg.*, vi, 13). What is signified by these inhabitants of Bethsames if it be not the perfect who have arrived at sublime contemplation? They truly belong to the house of the sun,[1] who, having spurned with their feet all earthly things, have been favoured with the light of truth. They are truly of the house of the sun who, dead to the world, and inflamed with love, burn with an ardent desire of contemplating the glory of God. . . . But why do the Bethsamites reap in the valley, except to show that it is by the virtue of humility that contemplatives obtain those interior delights which overwhelm their souls? In the language of Holy Scripture the valley designates the humble, as those words of the Psalmist addressed to the Lord prove: 'Thou sendest forth springs in the vales.' It is to those who have prepared themselves by humility that the Lord sends the floods of his grace. The Bethsamites reap in the valley when they draw down by their humility a brighter light; they gather the sheaves of sweet joys with which to nourish their souls" (*In I Reg.*, l. III, ch. iv, No. 19).

110. The virtuous life of the faithful Christian and his humility dispose him for the reception of heavenly graces, but the custody of the senses and the avoidance of preoccupations and cares enable him to keep recollected, and to be filled with the thought of God, and prepare him more immediately to receive the light of contemplation.

[1] Bethsames signifies "house of the sun."

"Why is it said that Elcana went up out of his city to Jerusalem? What is a city but a fortified enclosure, keeping all the inhabitants of a place in security? Does not the city here signify the perfect custody of the heart which prudently seeks a shelter from all attacks? Prudence, therefore, is an impregnable rampart protecting the inhabitants, for the enemy of mankind will not venture to trouble the peace of those whose prudence protects their virtue. . . . This is why our Lord says to his disciples: 'Stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high.' Stay in the city; this means that by constant daily solicitude we must watch over and guard our souls. As long as we dwell therein we shall obtain that power from on high, and, having disposed ourselves to become the temples of the Holy Ghost, we shall at last be raised to the contemplation of heavenly glory.

"The Ephraimite went up from his city to Jerusalem. This is a reproach to us for our negligence. We wish to be raised to the contemplation of divine things and do not trouble to guard our hearts, nor even to watch over our exterior conduct. We look about us, listen to idle talk, and chatter aimlessly; in the matter of sleep and food we indulge ourselves with more than the body requires. Then, when we wish to understand obscure things, things that are above us, and to disperse the clouds of ignorance, and to enjoy the sweetness of spiritual consolation, we are justly prevented, because it is in consequence of our negligence that the ramparts of our hearts are thrown down and destroyed. When, brought to our senses, we desire to rise again, this will be all the more difficult the less the trouble we have taken to repair the ramparts of our souls.

". . . . He, therefore, who desires to advance in perfection by contemplation must guard his senses, watch over his heart, and, standing as if on the unassailable position of the ramparts, wait to receive the divine light" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 6).

III. "He who desires nothing in this world is in great security. Directly a soul keeps steadily to the desire of heaven it is much less subject to troubles about the things of this life. Avoiding, therefore, every impulse and outward agitation, we should withdraw into ourselves as into a very private retreat, and there, becoming united to the unchanging Being, and having been raised above all creatures that change, we shall find, thanks to the calm within this retreat, peace for our souls, so that, without leaving the world, we are not of it. Thus, in pursuing heavenly

goods, we leave all inferior things far below" (*In Job* xxxi, 34; *Moralia*, l. XXII, ch. xvi, No. 35).

"'To whom I have given a house in the wilderness, and his dwellings in the barren land' (Job xxxix, 6). The solitude of the heart is here indicated. This solitude is first given to those who have led a virtuous life. For them the turbulence of earthly desires has ceased, and also all those troublesome cares which disturb the peace of the soul are calmed by the gift of heavenly charity, so that idle thoughts which, like importunate flies, incessantly annoy them, are sent away, and with them are banished all the feelings they produce, and finally they seek within themselves a place wherein to meet God, and there, in secret, every exterior sound having ceased, they speak to him in silence by the longing of their hearts.

"It has been said of this silent language: 'There was silence in heaven as it were for half an hour.' The heavens are the assembly of the elect, who, desiring by contemplation to rise to sublime and eternal things, repel base and unworthy thoughts in order to listen to the voice of God. In this life, however, the silence of contemplation can never be perfect; this why it is said to last for half an hour. The distraction of idle thoughts troubles, against his will, anyone who desires to apply himself to deep reflection and brings him back violently to earthly things; also silence only lasts for half an hour, for however earnestly one tries to apply oneself to perfect contemplation it is not possible to enjoy it in this world" (*Moralia*, l. XXX, ch. xvi).

112. A method recommended by St Gregory to facilitate as much as possible the action of the grace of contemplation is to give a momentary consideration to the whole of the creation and then to raise the mind to God. "This is how to advance in contemplation: From the consideration of a few objects pass on to the consideration of a great number; then view them all together; thus, proceeding gradually and seeing the feebleness of all creatures revealed by a single glance, rise above them in a manner almost incomprehensible" (Job xxv, 24; *Moralia*, l. XVII, ch. ix).

113. We have found that the Fathers strongly advise the fervent to forget all that is sensible in order to find God. The holy doctor gives the same advice. "When those who are perfect are full of compunction they endeavour to put away all those forms of earthly things that present themselves before their mental vision, and compel themselves to fix their whole attention on the light which has

neither form nor limit. These corporeal images and species making an impression, as they do, on the mind, proceed from natural infirmity. When these things become violently interesting the greatest care should be taken that in the pursuit of sensible objects the search after truth may not be laid aside. It is by indulging in these imaginations that we lower ourselves, and our attention becomes divided among a thousand different objects. The mind must be disengaged and rise above such things in order to arrive by the violence of charity at the contemplation of simple and incorporeal Being" (*In Job* xxxiii, 16; *Moralia*, l. XXIII, ch. xx, No. 42).

114. All this cannot be achieved without effort. "To rise to the contemplation of heavenly things, to apply the mind to what is purely spiritual, forsaking all that is earthly, requires at first a great concentration of mind and soul, a concentration in order to become afterwards enlarged and strengthened. At times the soul succeeds in getting rid of the darkness through which it is difficult to see the way, and receives a ray of infinite light almost as if by accident; but often also it seems to be repulsed and forced back upon itself. This is what Holy Scripture shows us in the struggle of Jacob with the angel. . . . Sometimes the Patriarch gained the ascendancy, sometimes he found his adversary was the stronger. Now, God is represented by the angel, and Jacob who wrestled with him represents the perfect Christian who devotes himself to contemplation. When he desires to attain to divine contemplation he sustains a kind of struggle. Sometimes he obtains the advantage, and then he enjoys a ray of that limitless light; at other times he succumbs, and then this reward is withheld. When the inner glance of the soul is fixed on God it is as if the angel had been overcome" (*In Ez.* l. II, *Hom. II*, No. 12).

115. In another passage the holy Pontiff recapitulates very clearly the means by which to obtain contemplation: "Those who desire to arrive at the summit of perfection and the fortress of contemplation should first exercise the virtues of the active life. They should be careful to give no offence to their neighbour, to bear patiently the trials caused them by others, to restrain any excess of joy when temporal goods are given them, or overwhelming sadness when they are taken away; to examine if, when they enter into themselves for the purpose of pious meditation, their imagination is free from earthly images, and if, in their desire to contemplate the light that has neither form nor limit, they understand that they must cast aside all recol-

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lection of creatures, and if, desiring to rise above self, they know how to overcome and vanquish themselves" (*Moralia*, l. VI, ch. xxxvii, No 59).

116. Whatever may be the efficacy of the means recommended by the holy Pontiff to obtain contemplation, they will not, at the first attempt, have the desired effect; it requires many efforts, and to return to the charge constantly; no one can arrive at the truly contemplative life in one day, nor can anyone in one day become perfect.

"When the faithful first start on the way of love their contemplation is but common and rudimentary; they do not at first enter into the joys of true contemplation. . . . And when they begin seriously to enter on the contemplation of eternal things (God and divine things), the more attentive they are to their marvellous beauty, the greater will be their enjoyment, for it is not possible to appreciate marvels that you have not seen. Moreover, the slower they are in rejecting the thought of creatures at the beginning of contemplation, the longer time will it take them to rise to it. In fact, as long as they do not renounce all worldly cares they will be blinded by the dust raised by these cares. First of all, therefore, they must clear away this dust, then strengthen their sight. The dust will be dispersed by dismissing from the mind all images of earthly things; the sight will be strengthened when, by constant meditation, they turn their attention to that which is eternal. When, in this way, they become habituated for a long time to dwelling in higher regions, their perseverance will deserve that they should become still more purified, and thus they will more clearly behold the eternal truths, and, discovering their splendour, will experience a keener joy. It is said that Anna had no son, and this shows the imperfection of beginners as well as the height of contemplation, which can only be had on the lofty mountain of merits, and the joys of fecundity oppose an obstacle to it. Jacob desired Rachel for his wife, but at first they gave him Lia, and to gain her whose beauty had won his heart he was obliged to double the seven years of labour exacted by her father. So he who desires contemplation imagines that he can at once enter into the superabounding joys it procures, but the giver of all gifts, the Holy Spirit, does not accord them so quickly; they would lose their value if they were so easily obtained; besides, this happiness is all the sweeter, and this treasure will be more carefully guarded, the more trouble it has taken to acquire" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 4).

117. "For as long as the contemplative is still at the

beginning his mind will be too flighty to settle steadily, and he will be unable to appreciate to the full the joys conferred by the sight of the divine Majesty. . . . But after a certain lapse of time the mind will become more settled, and will have acquired a certain solidity, habit will have rendered contemplation easier, and he will have learnt to remain therein and to appreciate the joys of perfect devotion" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 16).

"It is progress in virtue," as our author instructs us, "which produces progress in contemplation. He who only cares for heavenly things has not yet arrived at the summit if he has not experienced the sweetness of divine love. But he who has increased in virtue will obtain the grace to reach the highest degree of contemplation, and will arrive at the summit, for not only is he attached to heavenly things, but by the perfection of his charity all his happiness lies in the consideration of the divine greatness" (*In I Reg.*, l. II, ch. i).

118. It is precisely because the true contemplative life exacts this perfection in the practice of virtue that there are so few contemplatives.

"'There was a word spoken to me in private' (Job iv, 12). By this 'word in private' may be understood the voice that speaks to our souls, of which St John said: 'His unction teacheth you of all things' (1 John ii, 27). This divine whisper which reaches the human soul raises it, and, driving away temporal cares, rekindles heavenly desires in such a way that the heart aspires only to the glory to come, and despises everything that takes place in the depths of corrupt nature. To hear the private word is to hear in the depths of the heart the language of the Holy Spirit—that mysterious language of which those who have not heard it can form no idea. . . . But because those of the human race who have been purified from the soil of earthly desires are, thanks to this purification, rendered capable of hearing this voice of the Holy Spirit, it is called a private word, as being known only to a few and ignored by the greater part of mankind" (*Moralia*, l. V, ch. xxxviii, No. 50).

119. However, there is no state with which contemplation is incompatible. "It is said in the Book of Ezechiel that within the gate[1] there were slanting windows on every side (Ezec. xl, 16). This is to show that the grace of contemplation is given to the least as well as to the greatest; it is as often bestowed on the one as on the other. Those retired from the world are most frequently

[1] This refers to the gate of the symbolical temple shown to the prophet in a vision which he is relating.

favoured, yet it occasionally happens that married people receive it. Among faithful souls there is no occupation incompatible with the grace of contemplation; anyone leading a spiritual life may be favoured with it, and no one can boast of it as of an extraordinary privilege. . . . Not alone persons of high dignity in the Church receive this grace, but more often those to whom it is accorded are of very inferior station, and only raised by the nobility of their souls to a height above their avocations" (*In Ez.*, l. II, *Hom. V*, Nos. 19-20).

(4) *A description of the different contemplative states.*

120. What takes place in this contemplation, which, according to St Gregory, is such a desirable and precious state?

The soul receives in it great light on the formidable justice of God, on his almighty power and infinite mercy, and then experiences feelings of respect, submission, and joy.

"He who is raised to this tower of contemplation sees everything in the light that is given him, that which fills him with a salutary terror, as well as that which inspires him with ineffable consolation. He who has been favoured with this lofty insight has had laid bare to him the abyss of the awful judgements of God and the inexhaustible abundance of his mercies; this sight fills him with terror and with joy, a terror that induces him to renounce all attachment to the things of this world, and a joy to make him more ardently desire heavenly joys, of which he already possesses a foretaste.

"Then he adores God, whose immensity and almighty power, made manifest, inspire him with sentiments of profound submission, and help him to curb the appetites of the flesh in order to lead a life wholly spiritual, which is filled with the homage of adoration. At the same time, while offering himself in sacrifice, the more he humbles himself before the divine Majesty, the more is he captivated by the brilliant light accorded to him.

"Adoration means to render homage to the Almighty by a profound submission, and sacrifice signifies that the soul is filled with the ineffable sweetness of heavenly light. By the spiritual sacrifice the faithful soul consecrates itself to God when, in the transcending joy of ecstasy, it is inflamed with the fire of divine love" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 7).

121. In this state one does not see openly but only indistinctly the divine magnificence.

"The word of God is like a soft whisper. As long as the contemplative remains in this world the divine Majesty does not show himself as he is; he only reveals a faint ray of his glory to the wandering eye of the soul. . . . Even when the soul is rapt in the highest contemplation it is not God that it sees; nevertheless, it can be said to catch a glimpse of something which gives it a faint idea of the incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being.

"We are within the truth when, speaking of God, we acknowledge that of him we can know nothing perfectly" (*Moralia*, l. V, ch. xxxvi, No. 66).

122. "Often the loving soul is so loaded with the gifts of contemplation that it cannot explain all that it possesses; the Holy Spirit pours forth in it such a flood or torrent of graces that the soul receives more than it can comprehend" (*In Job* xx, 17; *Moralia*, l. XV, ch. xvi).

"Great, therefore, is the sweetness of the contemplative life, which, raising the soul above itself, discloses to it heavenly treasures, teaches it to despise the things of earth, hides from its sight created things, and gives it to understand things spiritual" (*In Ez.*, l. II, *Hom. II*, No. 13[1]).

Contemplation also procures for the soul a great peace.

"Whatever progress we may make in this present life, there still remains the infirmity of the flesh . . .; but as long as we remain detached we shall always be at peace. . . .

"*All faithful souls*, although still exposed to the assaults of the flesh, enjoy, in the inmost recesses of their hearts, the profound peace of contemplation; also whatever happens exteriorly causes them no trouble interiorly" (*In Job* xxxi, 34; *Moralia*, l. XXII, ch. xvi, No. 36).

123. Many different feelings are experienced in contemplation; sometimes the contemplative finds in it only sadness, but more frequently great joy.

St Gregory says that compunction, which the contemplative experiences after having received the light which has been communicated to him, imparts these feelings of sadness. He distinguishes four kinds of compunction: First, the sorrow felt by the enlightened soul about the past, in the remembrance of infidelities: 'I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God' (1 Cor. xv, 9). Secondly, fear of the judgements of

[1] *Cf.* St Thomas II-II, Q. 180, a. 7.

God: 'I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway' (1 Cor. ix, 27). Thirdly, a very lively feeling of the evils of this present life: 'All things are vanity: every man living' (Ps. xxxviii, 6). Fourthly and lastly, the pain of being deprived of the joys of heaven. 'Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged' (Ps. cxix, 5).

"'I said in the excess of my mind; I am cast away from before thy eyes' (Ps. xxx, 23). In the transports which make him beside himself the Psalmist recognizes that he has been cast out of sight by God. Enlightened interiorly, and returning to himself, he sees in contemplation the blessings of which he is deprived and the evils to which he is exposed. The evils of this present life cannot be realized, such as they are, unless, by the light of contemplation, a foretaste of eternal joys has been experienced.

"When he who is perfect is thus touched with compunction he endeavours to rid himself of all images of created things which so insolently intrude themselves on his mind . . . he desires to recollect himself and to concentrate his power, in the hope of attaining by the power of his love to the contemplation of the incorporeal Being.

"Thanks to his efforts, he obtains from time to time an interior taste of extraordinary sweetness, and feels renewed in spirit when he receives the sudden breath of grace as it passes. His desires increase with the possession and enjoyment of the object of his love; he seeks to attract to himself that which is so sweet to him, and holds himself as something very vile, now that he knows its value on account of having been so long deprived of it. He aspires to remain united to the object of his love, but his weakness does not permit this. God is strength itself and cannot be contemplated at pleasure. He is purity itself, therefore it remains only to weep, and these tears of weakness are themselves a consolation" (*In Job* xxxiii, 16; *Moralia*, l. XXIII, ch. xx, Nos. 41, 42, 43).

124. "'He shall pray to God, and he will be gracious to him; and he shall see his face with joy' (Job xxxiii, 26). It has been stated above what feelings of sorrowful compunction he who is faithful experiences, he to whom God has revealed himself; here the sacred author shows us the lively joy produced in the soul by this same knowledge of God. The contrary effect is produced by the examination of the conscience; one is terrified at the sight of one's miseries. This is quite the reverse of the feeling of hope

and peace obtained by the consideration of heavenly joys. In either case tears are shed, but in the former the tears are of sadness, in the latter of joy. This excessive joy is called 'jubilation,' and it can neither be hidden nor explained; it is betrayed by outward movements, but can be in no way defined.

"The sacred writer adds, therefore: He shall see his face with joy. He who is aware of his own blindness at first becomes sad with a consuming sadness which, like a devouring fire, destroys in him all the rust of sin; and afterwards the joys of his eternal home are shown to his purified eyes.

"It is necessary, therefore, that sorrow should purify him and disperse the darkness of evil in order that thereafter his soul may become completely illuminated with the rays of infinite light. Then the vision of this light will plunge him into the deepest joy, which is all peace, and, rapt out of himself, he will behold himself endowed with new life and inundated with a heavenly dew flowing from an infinite source. He beholds his powerlessness to attain those blessings that attract and enrapture him; he is conscious of the truth, but recognizes that it is impossible to comprehend how great this truth is, and the nearer he approaches it, the farther from it he believes himself to be. Nevertheless, he does see it, for if he did not perceive it in some way he could not realize how far it was above his attainment" (*Moralia*, l. XXIV, ch. vi, No. 11).

125. Contemplation cannot be of long duration; it would be impossible to keep for a length of time in a state so high.

"The soul remains, it is true, as if suspended in contemplation . . . ; but cannot remain in this way for long, for, while the Holy Spirit is impelling it towards the summit, the flesh drags it down with all the weight of its corruption and makes it fall back" (*Moralia*, l. V, ch. xxxii, No. 57).

"'When a Spirit passed before me the hair of my flesh stood up' (Job iv, 15).

"The Spirit passes before us when we arrive at the knowledge of things invisible, yet we only have a rapid view of them; for the soul does not remain for long in the sweetness of contemplation. The brightness of the heavenly light dazzles and recalls it to itself. The interior consolations that are allowed stimulate love. The soul desires to take flight and to rise on high, but the clouds which weakness cannot penetrate break down its strength, and it falls back. . . . It realizes that it cannot behold the object of its ardent love, and yet it would not love so

ardently unless it could, in some manner, see him. The Spirit, therefore, does not stay, it passes; because if the light from on high is communicated to us through contemplation we are soon deprived of it on account of our frailty" (*ibid.*, ch. xxxiii, No. 58).

"Now that he who is faithful has quelled all earthly desires, he leaves beneath him all those objects of whose frailty he is aware, he renounces all exterior pleasures and wishes to think only of those that are invisible. When he is in this frame of mind he usually experiences the sweet ecstasies of contemplation, and, perceiving confusedly—*quasi per caliginem*, as if darkly—something of these deep mysteries, endeavours, in the impetuosity of his desires, to take part in the spiritual functions of the angelic choirs. He feasts on the delights of the divine light and, going out of himself, disdains to return to his habitual condition. But as the body, subject to corruption, weighs down the soul, the latter cannot remain for any length of time united to the light, and only sees it in a hidden manner. The infirmity of the flesh weighs down this soul that had been raised to such a height" (*Moralia*, l. VIII, ch. xxx).

"It is therefore an effort of the mind to seek to possess the supreme truth. It is repelled and dazzled by the brilliance of the light which surrounds it on every side, because this infinite truth is everywhere present. It fills and surrounds every creature; our feeble intellect is cramped into such narrow limits that it is powerless to embrace it, and this is why the soul very quickly falls back on itself" (*Moralia*, l. XXIV, ch. vi, No 12).

126. A rest from the contemplation of the Supreme Being, then, can be had by that of superior creatures.

"'And Elcana went to Ramatha to his house' (*I Reg.*, ii, 11).

"One who is faithful is obliged on account of human frailty to cease from the contemplation of God, but desirous of returning to it later, should entrench himself in a fortified place where he could retire, to mount afterwards to higher regions of true charity. This is why in Holy Scripture it is said of Jerusalem, which is a figure of the faithful soul: 'Stand on high and behold the joy that cometh to thee from God' (Baruch iv, 36, and v, 5). Seeing that you cannot remain always in the contemplation of God, do not descend too low, but stay on the ramparts so that you can without difficulty rise again at once to this desirable contemplation. He returns to Ramatha, who, being unable to maintain himself in the contemplation of the Supreme Being, descends to the contemplation of the angelic nature, and if this is too

dazzling has recourse by meditation to the thought of the martyrs and saints" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No 15).

127. And even as this contemplation cannot last always, the good works of the active life must take its place. "When we interrupt the works of the active life to raise ourselves to contemplation the mind cannot remain long in this contemplation; all that it sees of eternal things it sees as in a mirror, or as an enigma, and consequently only gets a passing glimpse of them; its weakness is dazzled at the sight of so much glory, and it speedily falls back upon itself. It is necessary, therefore, to return to the active life, and to exercise oneself constantly in the practice of good works. . . .

"Thus, helped by these good works, we shall be able to rise once more to contemplation and shall find food for love in the sight of the eternal truths. And as we cannot remain always therein, we must return again to the practice of good works, retaining in our minds the sweet memory of God; thus we shall be supported exteriorly by good works and interiorly by holy desires" (*In Ez.*, l. I, *Hom. V*, No. 12).

"If life be well regulated as to passing from the active to the contemplative state, it is generally useful to return from the life of contemplation to the active life, the ardour derived from contemplation inducing a better observance of the rules of the active life" (*In Ez.*, l. II, *Hom. II*, No. 11).

128. Such is the contemplative state, a state so precious that those who are raised to it cannot sufficiently appreciate their happiness, but rejoice that they are no longer as they formerly were.

"Those days are days of ascension; for when we are not favoured with this enlightenment we remain in the valley, and when we are raised to this high knowledge we understand in what an abyss we were until then. Then we are horrified at the state in which we were; we congratulate ourselves on our present condition, for the heart, enraptured with the love of divine things, is delighted with the knowledge it enjoys, and conceives an intense repugnance for all that is earthly" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 4).

129. At the same time it would be a great error to suppose that then we are secure from temptation. It is even possible that we might, at one and the same time, be favoured with contemplation and a prey to painful temptations.

"It often happens that some may be raised by the divine Spirit to the heights, and at the same time be enduring the

most violent assaults of the flesh. At the very moment when they are led to the contemplation of heavenly things, representations of unlawful actions may appear before them, and the sting of the flesh will be grievously felt by those who have been raised above the flesh by holy contemplation. It seems as though heaven and hell were met there together, since the same soul is at the same time illumined by the light of contemplation and darkened by importunate temptation" (*Moralia*, l. X, ch. x, No. 17).

"Each time that it is given to the prophet to contemplate spiritual things he is called the son of man. . . . This name brings to mind the memory of his frailty, and prevents him taking pride in the greatness of his contemplation. For the same reason the greater number of those who are most favoured with the gifts of contemplation have to suffer the most from importunate temptations, and this happens often to those who are making real progress. Their hearts are moved to compunction, contemplation takes them out of themselves, and then immediately follows temptation, to prevent them becoming proud of these gifts. Compunction or contemplation will raise the soul to God, but the burden of temptation makes it fall back upon itself. Temptation abases only to prevent contemplation from inflating; and contemplation lifts up again, so that temptation should not dishearten. . . .

"Look at Elias. He had brought down fire from heaven, had kept back the rain, and yet a mere woman sufficed to strike terror into his heart and to make him fly into the desert. In his flight an angel appeared to him, gave him food, and told him that he had yet a long journey to take, but did not relieve his heart of the terror, for this weakness of the prophet was the safeguard of his strength" (*In Ez.*, l. II, *Hom. II*, Nos. 2 and 3).

(5) *Action and contemplation.*

130. He who has written so well and so wisely on contemplation was himself a great contemplative. We have already remarked that his activity also was prodigious; to this the great works that he achieved for the Church bear witness. "It is possible," said he, "to give oneself up to a life of contemplation without on that account relinquishing a life of activity" (*Hom. III, in Ezech.*, No. 12).

"The more favoured a soul is with sublime contemplation, the more fervent and devoted is it in action. It is only with beginners and the imperfect that the one injures the other; thus one of Elcana's wives (Phenenna, example of the active life) afflicted and violently tormented the other

(Anna, example of contemplation). This struggle does not exist among the perfect. Taught by experience, they have the wisdom to judge when they ought to leave works for contemplation, and the two live in peace because the perfect never give to contemplation the time allotted to action, and neither do they disturb by outward activity the silence of contemplation" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 10).

131. Perfection therefore consists in maintaining a just measure between the one and the other. But too frequently action is given the greater part, and in this way the advantages of contemplation are lost.

"'Her rival afflicted and troubled her exceedingly' (*I Reg.* i, 6).

"Anna is afflicted by her rival when an intemperate zeal for good works disturbs the peace of contemplation. She is afflicted because the other is preferred before her, who is the most noble. She is exceedingly troubled when the contemplation of the faithful soul is hindered, when he who is called to contemplation gives himself immoderately to the works of the active life.

"When, on account of her fecundity, we prefer Phenenna, Anna is in sorrow and anguish. She is ashamed when she hears herself reproached for her sterility. So when we do not know how to restrict to convenient limits our fervour for outward works, we do not give the preference to the noblest part, and thus render the purity of contemplation more difficult. However, he who has begun to raise himself to the higher regions (of contemplation), if he remain firm in his attempt, need not despair on account of the obstacles he encounters; he should persevere in his enterprise, and know how to give up the attractions of activity, and decide to seek no other consolation save in the sight of the beauty of God" (*In I Reg.*, ch. ii, No. 11).

132. A predilection for the active life is the only reason why so many superiors and priests do not receive the favour of contemplation.

"Those who pass at once to the silence of contemplation have first led an active life, but when they are recollected in contemplation the cares of the exterior life do not pursue them. There are some who love the contemplative life, the charms of which they understand, yet they are not allowed to enjoy it. As they are destined to govern the faithful flock exteriorly, the Lord grants them Michol, the younger of the two sisters (the daughter of Saul, and a type of the active life), but Merob, the elder (figure of the contemplative life), is always denied to them. A great number, however, after previously obtaining the first, obtain the other also, for, after giving them-

selves up to works of devotion, they are admitted to the secrets of a more intimate love; this we understand from the example of Jacob, who loved Rachel but only obtained her hand after that of Lia. Do you know why it was allowed to Jacob to have both, whilst to David the elder of the two sisters was not given as wife? It was because David was a king and not Jacob. Those who have charge of souls incur the censures of the Church if they forsake their flock to enjoy the repose of a life of solitude. Merob is promised to David, but is not given to him; he only obtains Michol. Many, in fact, while accepting the charge of souls imagine that they will be able to attend to their flocks and at the same time be occupied about themselves, but they do not find in the exercise of charity the repose of which they dreamed, and, seeing that the gift of this great purity of soul has been denied them by God, they tremble lest they have incurred the divine wrath" (*In I Reg.*, l. V, ch. iv, No. 67).

133. The union of the contemplative with the active life cannot be too strongly recommended.

"Contemplatives give themselves very little to exterior works, but a good deal to the hidden work of contemplation; they seldom attend to the exterior, but often to the interior, for every moment taken from the contemplation of Christ appears to them a criminal infidelity" (*In I Reg.*, l. V, ch. iv, No. 68).

"On the contrary, the active life, troubled incessantly with a multitude of works, gives very little time for the repose of contemplation. He who wishes to gain an eternal reward, not by resting and listening at the feet of our Lord, but by bustling about and wearing himself out in his service, regards, I will not say as an evil, but as a waste of time what he does for himself and his own soul at the expense of his ordinary works. He gives much more time to works than to prayer. Let us profit by the example of Martha, who stopped in the midst of her work to speak to Jesus, and let us who devote ourselves for our brethren, if we cannot remain for a length of time at the feet of our Saviour, at least pause occasionally near him. In going about our work let us have our eyes fixed on him, for in this way we shall have him for our aim in all things. We come and go when we are occupied in serving the Lord in his members, and in doing this we keep our eyes fixed on him if, in each and all of our works, he is present in our minds and we continue to contemplate him whom we desire to please.

"Those who give themselves to the active life should guard against an excessive impetuosity. This is why

Martha was rebuked for her carefulness, which amounted to trouble. In order that our zeal for work should be well regulated, while giving our energies to it we must direct our thoughts to him for whom we are working. Excessive impetuosity engenders trouble and confusion in our thoughts and actions; the soul thus distracted and divided by these cares is no longer capable of rising to divine contemplation. Even when concentrated and simplified by recollection it has difficulty, on account of its simplicity, in seizing the eternal object of heavenly vision; how, then, could it do so with a mind distracted and divided? This is why the Master and Judge of our works says, 'One thing is necessary,' because he wills that our minds, instead of being spread over a great number of objects, should be recollected in silence and peace, so that they might be able to rise with all their powers to the contemplation of the Sovereign Good" (*In I Reg.*, l. V, ch. iv, No. 69).

134. "'I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please' (Cant. ii, 7).

"The saintly soul, the spouse of Christ, aspires to find peace far from the tumult of the world, and desires to be delivered from all earthly passions and to rest in a holy sleep on the breast of the Spouse. It is an effort even to speak to him; it would wish only to listen to his voice in peace and joy. But in the Church there are other persons who are earthly and carnal and are not afraid of interrupting this sweet sleep to meddle in the affairs of the world because their lives seem to them to be useless unless given up to cares and business affairs. . . .

"To these it is forbidden in the most solemn manner to trouble with importunate solicitudes the soul that wishes to forget all else to think only of God. . . .

"However, this does not mean that all zeal for one's neighbour should be forbidden, but the soul must be allowed to choose at its own pleasure the time to awake. Is it not for the perfect to know when they should apply themselves to contemplation, and when they should work for the good of their brethren?" (*In Cantic.*, ch. i, No. 8)

135. Those especially whom God has called to the apostolic mission should unite the contemplative with the active life.

"See how the Saviour of the human race spent his days in the towns, working miracles, and passed his nights in prayer on the mountains. In this he sets an example to his priests, teaching them neither to neglect the active life for contemplation nor to despise the joys of contemplation

by an excessive attachment to the active life. They ought to draw from contemplation that which they, by preaching, pour out again into the souls of their brethren" (*In Job* v, 26; *Moralia*, l. VI, ch. xxxvii, No. 56).

"All that the sacred minister proposes to those under his jurisdiction as a rule for their conduct he draws from the examples of the saints, or from the lessons of Holy Scripture, or from the light derived from contemplation. . . ."

"He who is acquainted with the examples of the saints, or is versed in the knowledge of Holy Scripture, yet is not favoured with the light of contemplation, cannot be a perfect preacher.

"To possess fully the gift of preaching it is necessary to walk by humility in the footsteps of the saints, to dwell on the instructions in holy books, but, above all, to take extreme care to arrive, by purity of heart, at contemplation, in order to learn from it what best to say" (*In I Reg.*, l. III, ch. v, No. 30).

"In holy Church, he who has the charge of instructing his brethren should rarely appear in public, but frequently remain in solitude; the less prodigal of himself he is, the more respected he will be. He will seem like a celestial messenger if, having remained hidden in contemplation, he then pour forth the treasures of the divine word to those who expect them from him" (*In I Reg.*, l. IV, ch. v, No. 30).

"We should fix the hours for our ministry so that too considerable a time may not be given to exterior works, and we can quickly return to contemplation as to an assured refuge" (*ibid.*, No. 36).

"That the contemplative life is represented by the beautiful Rachel is the undisputed doctrine of the Fathers. The men spoken of by Samuel (*I Reg.*, x, 2) keep near the tomb of Rachel; that is to say that true and perfect preachers give themselves up to contemplation without ceasing to consecrate all their devotion to holy Church. They remain near the tomb of Rachel because they draw from contemplation a rule for their conduct, and they do no exterior work until they have derived strength and light from contemplation" (*In I Reg.*, l. IV, ch. v, No. 4).

(6) *The fruits of contemplation.*

136. According to St Gregory, the contemplative life is the perfect life. This he has made quite clear, and all that he has taught us about contemplation shows that he regards it as the ordinary consequence of a life of perfec-

tion. But this results no less manifestly from the fruits he attributes to it—humility, strength, and detachment.

In the first place, contemplation, far from being a cause of pride to the soul, increases her humility.

"When saintly souls realize the unfathomable power of the Creator in their contemplation, the virtues they possess seem very small, and their humility increases in proportion to their better comprehension of the sublimity of him who is high above the angels" (*Hom. VIII in Ez.*, No. 17).

137. Contemplation gives great power to overcome the wiles of the devil.

"'My mouth is enlarged over my enemies' (*I Reg.*, II, i).

"Who are the enemies of the soul if not the evil spirits? To open one's mouth against enemies is to reject all the suggestions of the devil, thanks to an abundance of heavenly light; but not to know what answer to give the deceptive insinuations of these accursed ones is to have the mouth shut.

"The reasoning faculties are the mouth of the soul, and it speaks when made use of to reflect. The mouth, then, is filled when these faculties, through the grace of contemplation, are raised to the knowledge of the sovereign truth. . . . We then learn what we ought to despise in time and what we should desire for eternity. As the sovereign truth is all charity, faithful souls, nourished with this truth, become all inflamed with love, and the more fervent is their charity, the better they keep the teachings they have received. Then the evil spirits suggest their treacherous temptations in vain; they are confounded when we open our mouths against them. Strong with the wisdom that has been given, and filled with the fire of charity, our souls will have abundant light to confound their lies, and by the same ineffable charity will be protected from the attractions of the world" (*In I Reg.*, l. II, ch. i, No. 4).

138. "The more abundantly faithful souls receive the heavenly food of contemplation, the more brightly do they shine with the radiance of every virtue.

"Why is it said (*I Reg.*, vii, 2) that in the twentieth year all the house of Israel rested following the Lord, if not to denote that the perfection of the faithful does not depend on works, but on the virtue of contemplation. To rest following the Lord is to remain faithful by an unshaken love to the imitation of our divine Redeemer. Now, he who has not learnt through contemplation to relish the ineffable joys of the heavenly city, and who is still often inclined to give way to the love of the world, cannot be

said to rest following the Lord. The Ark remained, therefore, at Cariathiarim, and day after day passed while all the people of Israel rested following the Lord. Truly, when faithful souls have learnt to relish the delights of heaven, when, thanks to the light received, they see at a glance the dazzling beauty of the different virtues, it becomes much easier to persevere in imitating our Lord . . . because the higher the insight possessed by the contemplative into the knowledge of divine things, the more easy he finds it to resist the attraction of things earthly and human" (*In I Reg.*, l. III, ch. v, Nos. 4 and 5).

139. "Contemplation detaches from earthly things. "'Thou shalt enter into the grave in abundance, as a heap of wheat is brought in its season (Job v, 26).

"The tomb here signifies the contemplative life, which buries those who are dead to this world; for those who are admitted to the secrets of contemplation are, by that very fact, freed from earthly desires. They are as though dead to this world, and have been buried by contemplation. As St Paul says: 'You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.' The active life also is a tomb, because it makes us die to evil deeds; but much more so is the life of contemplation, because it separates us completely from the life of the world" (*Moralia*, l. VI, ch. xxxvii, No. 56).

"It is to be remarked that the vanquished angel touched Jacob on the nerve of his thigh, which immediately withered, and from that time Jacob was lame; this means that the Lord Almighty dries up within us all sensual affection when, thanks to our good desires and to our mental efforts, we succeed in knowing him;[1] and if formerly we have walked on two feet, seeking God but not renouncing the world, from the moment we have understood how good God is we have only one sound foot; the other remains lame; the love of the world must weaken in order that divine love may reign alone in our souls" (*In Ez.*, l. II, *Hom. II*, No. 13).

140. Such is the mystical teaching of this great Pope. It is complete, clear, profound, practical, and from every point of view worthy of the great name of St Gregory.

In the centuries which followed, up to the twelfth century, we shall have but few authors to quote. It was from the works of the Fathers that the rules of the spiritual life were drawn, and thus the doctrine which we have expounded is the same in all. Two examples will suffice.

[1] By contemplation, according to the context.

5. *The Venerable Bede.*

141. Let us give, in the first place, a short extract from the works of St Bede, who lived in the eighth century.

"The perfection of the contemplative life consists in keeping the spirit free from all that is earthly, and, as much as the weakness of human nature permits, in uniting it to Christ.

"It is with good reason that Martha is represented standing and Mary seated at the feet of our Lord, because the active life is composed of work and struggle, but the contemplative soul, having pacified the revolt of the passions, enjoys in Christ a much-desired peace.

"'One thing is necessary.' The holy King David, explaining this one thing necessary to man, asks to remain always united to God. 'It is good for me,' he says, 'to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God.' And in another place he says: 'One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may see the delight of the Lord, and may visit his temple.' Theology —that is to say, the contemplation of God—is, then, the only signal grace which is preferable to all merits and to all virtues" (*In Luc.* x).

6. *St Peter Damian.*

142. St Peter Damian lived in the eleventh century (1007-1072). The influence he exercised by his knowledge was very great, but still greater was the influence of the example of his heroic virtues. He merited the title of doctor of the Church. In a treatise *On the Perfection of Monks* he treated the question of the contemplative and perfect life.

The holy doctor begins by deploring the decadence of the religious spirit. Too few aspire after perfection; it is not sufficient for religious to be converted and to renounce evil; it is also necessary to do penance. The saint at the same time recommends them not to make use of all that is accorded in mercy to human frailty; they should be more generous and do more than what is strictly imposed if they wish to cross the Jordan and to enter the land flowing with milk and honey.

143. What, then, is this promised land? It means the state of contemplation and divine union. Let us hear what the holy doctor has to tell us on this subject.

Ch. viii: "All our good works and our renunciation of the world have no other object than to gain peace. The acquisition of this peace entails many a struggle and much

labour. Then, when all this tumult and these troublesome struggles are ended, the soul receives the grace of contemplation and betakes itself to the study of the truth. Since, then, it is only through trials and combats that peace is secured, how comes it that he who has to encounter the enemy should hide himself? How can he who refuses to enter the court in front of the King's gates expect to be introduced into his palace? How can he who knows nothing of the art of agriculture, and has neither prepared the ground nor ploughed the soil, expect to have a crop of corn to thrash, and a harvest to gather into his barns, or wine wherewith to fill his vats, if he have not pruned his vines?

144. "It is a well-understood fact that Jacob desired to wed the younger of Laban's two daughters, and that the wished-for union could not be accomplished until, without his knowledge, and contrary to his wishes, the elder had been substituted as a spouse. This, however, is a well-known history to those to whom I am addressing myself, and it is useless to reiterate it. 'Laban' means 'whiteness.' He who is converted and gives himself to God puts away the blackness of sin, and his soul is made white by the grace of forgiveness. 'Lia' means 'labour,' 'Rachel' 'the word' and 'the duly considered principle.'[1] If we examine the sacred Scriptures attentively, we shall see that not for a single day did Jacob work with the idea of obtaining Lia, but laboured for two weeks of years as Laban's servant, for the sole purpose of having Rachel given to him. He tolerated Lia with a view to Rachel. It is not, in fact, to endure labours and trials and the assaults of temptation that we give ourselves to God. He who seeks God has, on the contrary, the wish to obtain peace, and some day to find this peace in the delights of heavenly contemplation, like Jacob when united to the beautiful Rachel.

"Nevertheless, this so much desired interior peace cannot be obtained without first enduring a painful struggle. It is necessary to be humbled even to servitude if we desire to merit perfect liberty. This service of seven years signifies the observance of the seven precepts of the Decalogue, which concern our duties to our neighbour, and thus the preservation of the whiteness of our souls. . . .

[1] This explanation of the meaning of the word formerly given by St Augustine: *De cons. Evang.*, l. I, ch. v, *P.L.*, t. XXXIV, col. 1045 and *Contra Faust.*, l. XXII, ch. lii, *P.L.*, t. XLII, col. 433, is not correct: Lia signifies languishing, Rachel sheep, but this linguistic error does not affect the doctrine. We have heard St Gregory say: Rachel represents the contemplative life, and this is the uncontested doctrine of the Fathers (supra, n. 135). The authors of the Middle Ages followed this explanation.

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"Even if these laws are faithfully observed we may not at once obtain the desired sweetness of contemplation. Instead of enjoying the charms of Rachel, Lia is substituted without our knowledge in the middle of the night, which means that in the dark night of human ignorance heavy tasks are imposed upon us. Also by Lia the faithful soul engenders a numerous progeny; that is to say, that by these tasks it acquires numerous merits and obtains great spiritual profit.

"Therefore, Lia must be tolerated and this laborious life accepted in order one day to obtain that after which it ceases not to sigh. Jacob consents to another seven years of painful service. It is necessary now for the faithful Christian to observe seven other precepts, but the yoke is lighter because these precepts are no longer the legal ones imposed on servants, but are the evangelical counsels recommended as to a son-in-law; he has to be poor in spirit, meek, to weep, to hunger and thirst after justice, to be merciful, to have a pure heart, and, finally, to be a peacemaker. We would, indeed, if it were possible, avoid the weariness of labour and the burden of suffering; we would desire to enjoy the sweets of contemplation without the preliminary trials of the spiritual life, but this cannot be during our mortal life; it is the privilege of the land of the living.

"When these two weeks of the ancient law and of evangelical grace have expired, then shall we be admitted to the long-desired embraces of Rachel.[1]

145. Ch. ix: "As Jacob accepted all his other wives with the sole view of obtaining Rachel, so those who wish to gain much fruit for God should place before every other thing the obtaining of the grace of contemplation.

Ch. x: "Alas! many are to be found in the house of Laban who live in such sloth and spiritual laxity that they have no desire for Rachel, although she is so charming and attractive, neither do they apply themselves to the laborious life of Lia. These are they who, even if they be inmates of monasteries, yet do not attempt to obtain the gift of contemplation either by a more retired life and constant fervent prayer, or by chastising the body by fasting and good works. They are not spouses, but are content to be only servants, those who think only of leading a soft and useless life; and if they do anything it is not to gain the fruits either of the active or the contemplative state, but to gratify their caprice and to follow their own will."

[1] All this reproduces the passage of St Augustine, indicated above.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

1. *St Bernard.*

146. What shall we say about St. Bernard (1091-1153)? Praise would be superfluous, for nothing that we could say of him would add to the esteem which our readers have for him. Rather let us listen to him; his words are so gentle, inflamed, and full of unction that it is a pleasure to hear them. If there is less point and precision in his teaching on mysticism than in that of many other masters, at any rate his writing is full of grace and charm.

(1) *The desire of contemplation and of divine union.*

147. According to St Bernard, the crown of the spiritual life, that state which should be the object of our aspirations and efforts, is a holy union with the divine Word, the admirable union of two spouses filled with a mutual affection. The soul, in this state, has a will entirely conformed to the will of God, and thinks of him without intermission. God, on his side, entertains this lively affection by frequent visits, all too short, in which he enlightens the mind and inflames the heart. Thanks to this light and to the divine ardour obtained in contemplation, the soul is taken out of itself and lives for God only, and the words of Holy Scripture can rightly be applied to it: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. vi, 17).

148. St Bernard endeavours to explain the Canticle of Canticles. This Canticle is the song of the perfect, it is a nuptial song, the work of a soul on fire with love.

Thus, "at each degree to which we attain, according to our powers, we should sing a special canticle to the praise and glory of him to whom our progress is due.

"But there is one canticle the excellence and sweetness of which raise it above all those we have mentioned, and deservedly, indeed, above every other, and this is entitled the 'Canticle of Canticles,' because it is the fruition of all the others. It is revealed to us only by its secret unction, and experience alone can teach it. May those

who understand it get to understand it better, and may those who have no knowledge of it have a great desire not so much to know it as to appreciate it.

"To sing this canticle, or to listen to it, is not the privilege of youth, of the inexperienced, or of those who have only recently forsaken the world; it is the portion of those already advanced in years who are well instructed and on the road to perfection, so that it can be said of them that with the help of God they have attained the perfect age and have, if I may say so, arrived at a marriageable age, an age considered with regard to merit, and not as regards years, an age of the soul that has become capable of union with its heavenly Spouse" (*I Serm. In Cant.*, Nos. 10, 11, 12).

149. The first word of this canticle is the daring wish of the loving soul claiming the kiss of the divine Spouse: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."[1] St Ambrose and St Gregory have already explained this wish for the divine kiss as the desire for contemplation. St Bernard follows this exegesis. According to him, there are three kinds of kisses; either the feet, the hand, or the face of the Spouse can be kissed. The first kiss is that of repentance, and belongs to beginners; the second is granted to the more advanced, and is that of hope; as to the third, only the perfect, who are, alas![2] too rare, merit the enjoyment of it; it is an overflow of divine joys, the understanding of the secrets of the Most High, of things heavenly; it is the kiss of contemplation and of the union of love (*Serm. IV* and *IX*).

150. Addressing himself to those who have shared only in the two first kisses, the saints says:

"In receiving these two kisses you have had a double experience of the goodness of God; I hope that you will not blush to aspire now to the more holy embrace, for you ought to gain in confidence as you grow in grace. Thus you will love more ardently and will ask with more assurance for that which you feel to be wanting to you. 'Knock and it will be opened to you.' I do not believe that God will refuse this higher kiss, so valuable and of such in-

[1] It is necessary to say that under these symbols of human affection our saintly doctor sees only an entirely spiritual love, in agreement with holy Scripture. Those who understand the love of the soul for our Lord in another sense would be grossly deceived, and in a state of dangerous illusion.

[2] St Bernard, in another of his sermons on the Canticle, utters the same complaint. "To-day in the Church we have many canals and few reservoirs"—that is to say, there are many who pass on grace to others, but very few who are filled with it themselves. (See below, No. 158).

estimable sweetness, to anyone who implores it with the right dispositions" (*Serm. III*, No. 5).

In his Treatise on conversion, addressed to clerics, the holy doctor invites the converted sinner, after he has bitterly repented of his sins, to long for heavenly blessings, "the paradise of interior joys—*Paradisum voluptatis internae*. If he seek it faithfully he will find this paradise, this garden embellished with the loveliest flowers, wherein he will enhale the freshest and purest air; . . . for he who said, 'Take my yoke upon you, and you will find rest for your souls' is no liar." But the faithful soul must not be disheartened at the repugnance of the will, but must persevere. "The Lord will come to the help of him who seeks him, one who aspires after him. He will give him a firm will, so that he will not only see this place of delights, but will be admitted to settle therein as in his home. There the eyes of the soul receive the mild rays of a stainless purity and of a guileless faith, while the ears are regaled and gladdened with the words of the divine Consoler. There hope breathes the pleasant odour of fertile fields loaded with the gifts of God. There with a holy eagerness the incomparable delights of love can be enjoyed, and thereafter, delivered from the briars and thorns with which it had been torn, the soul, inundated with the unction of the divine goodness, enjoys, in the depths of a good conscience, the sweetness of repose. . . . This is that hundredfold promised to those who despise the world. Do not expect that my discourse will make you understand the great value of this state. Only the Holy Spirit can make it clear to you. And vainly will you expect to learn it from books; try rather to experience it. . . . This is a wisdom the value of which is unknown. The pleasures of this world cannot impart such happiness, since it is the happiness of God himself; without having enjoyed it you cannot understand it. 'Taste and see how sweet is the Lord,' he says of himself. It is a hidden manna, it is an ineffable name, unknown save to those who receive it. Not study, but grace, imparts this light; . . . it is the sacred treasure, the pearl of Holy Scripture. . . . At the entrance to this paradise a heavenly voice is heard, a divine secret is learnt, hidden from the wise and prudent of this world, and revealed to little ones; a precious revelation not restricted to the reason, but shared by the will. 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.' . . . Is there one among you, my brethren, who desires to be satiated and to have all his desires accomplished? He must begin by

hungering after justice, and he will assuredly have his fill. . . . If he endeavour to acquire, for even one moment, a taste of justice, he would go on to desire it more and more, and thus would merit more and more to obtain it, as it is written: 'They that eat me shall yet hunger, and they that drink me shall yet thirst'" (*Eccli.* xxiv, 29; *De conversione*, ch. xii, xiii, xiv).

151. St Bernard makes us hear the sighs of the soul desiring the divine kiss: "Let us suppose, then, that the friends of the Bridegroom, who have come to visit and salute the Bride, find, on drawing near to her, that she is sighing in secret and is overcome with weariness. They try to find out the cause, and question her in this way: 'What can have happened to you? Why do we find you so much sadder than usual? What can be the reason for these unexpected lamentations? If you have forgotten yourself so far as to have the misfortune of falling into the hands of deceivers, and to be led astray by them, do you not feel impelled to return to your Spouse? Have you not earnestly besought him, with prayers and tears, at least to allow you to kiss his feet?' 'I have done so,' she replies. 'Well, then, having obtained this grace, and with it the forgiveness of your unfaithfulness, in the kiss of his feet, have you not in your impatience expected a greater familiarity and demanded a further grace? And you have obtained it. And in the kiss of the hand you have found many marvellous virtues.' 'I know it,' she answers. The friends continue: 'But did you not declare that if the kiss of the hand were granted you, this favour would satisfy you and put an end to your prayers?' 'Yes.' 'Are you complaining that a right that has been granted to you has been withdrawn again?' 'No, certainly not.' 'Are you afraid, then, that the pardon you thought you had obtained for your former disorders has been rescinded?' 'No.' 'Tell us, then, if there is anything we can do for you.' 'Ah!' she exclaims, 'I shall have no rest till the Spouse kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. I am grateful for the kiss of the feet, and thankful for the kiss of the hand, but it is the kiss of the mouth that I desire. I am not ungrateful, but I love. I have already received more than I deserve, but not as much as I desire. I implore you not to call the ardour of my love presumption. Respect protests, it is true, but affection carries all before it. I know that the King's majesty is shown by his love of justice, but a violent love is not to be restrained by justice. It does not attend to counsels of moderation, nor is it controlled by respect, nor led by reason. I ask, I implore, I

demand that he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. Already in my love for him I strive to lead a pure and mortified life; I apply myself to reading, I resist my passions, I give myself to prayer, I keep guard against temptation; in the bitterness of my soul I recall the years that are past. I endeavour to live in peace with all men, at least as far as I can. I am submissive to my superiors. My conduct is guided by the will of those who are older than I. I do not envy the good fortune of others. I give what I can and give myself also. I eat my bread in the sweat of my brow. These duties have become habitual to me; I do not seek any satisfaction from them.'

"Many of you, in private converse, I remember, have complained of dryness, of aridity, of a sort of spiritual dulness which made them incapable of understanding the things of God as too high, too subtle, and which deprived them entirely, or nearly so, of all devotion. What did they do, then, if not sigh for the kiss? Yes, they asked and desired the spirit of wisdom and understanding—understanding to attain to God, wisdom to enjoy what understanding had seized" (*Serm. IX*, Nos. 1, 2, 3).

152. And these desires, if they be fervent, will be granted. St Bernard goes on to say: "This kiss, so greatly to be prized, God does not refuse to well-disposed souls." In another sermon he says: "If any among us find, with the prophet, happiness in belonging to God; if, to speak more clearly, there be among you a man of desires, sighing to be dissolved and to be with Christ; if his desires are ardent, continual, and consuming, this man will undoubtedly receive the Word, and will receive him as a spouse. It will be the visit of the Bridegroom that he will receive when he feels himself interiorly clasped in the arms of wisdom and filled with the sweetness of divine love. Thus even before his soul has quitted the body his desires of being united to Christ will be granted" (*Serm. XXXII*, No. 2).

153. St Bernard often reverts to this promise. "You also, if, with recollected spirit and tranquil soul free from every care, you enter alone into the house of prayer; if, standing in the presence of God, before the altar, you knock at the door of heaven with holy desire; if you enter into the assembly of the saints with a piercing devotion (for the prayer of the just pierces the heavens); if, like a beggar, you deplore in their presence the miseries and afflictions which weigh you down; if you make known your poverty and your groanings; if, I repeat, you act thus, I am confident that he who said,

'Ask and you shall receive' (Matt. vii, 7), will hear and answer you. If you continue to knock you will not return with empty hands, and when you will have come back to us full of grace and charity, may the fervour of your heart prevent you concealing the favour you have received and make you share with us the grace which has enriched you and has rendered you, not only agreeable to others, but greatly to be admired. Then in your turn you can say in solemn truth: 'The king brought me into the cellar of wine'" (*Serm. XLIX*, No. 3).

154. "In the hour assigned by the rule for our conferences I have, during these three days, devoted as much time as possible to establishing the affinity of the Word with the soul. Of what use can be the study of this subject? We will explain. We have taught that every human soul, even though loaded with sin, and caught in the network of vice, and led astray by its charms in this exile, this prison of the body, sticking to the dunghill, deep in the mud, enslaved by its members, amidst the cares and distractions of life, amidst its fears, sorrows, errors, solicitudes, and suspicions, that this soul, a stranger among enemies, and, according to the saying of the prophet, defiled among the dead, and ranked with the inhabitants of hell, even this soul, thus condemned and despairing, can retire within itself, and not only sigh for pardon and hope for mercy, but may even dare to aspire to the marriage of the Word, and to contract an intimate alliance with God, and to bear the sweet yoke of the King of Angels. What, therefore, may not it have a right to venture towards him whose image it bears and whose likeness it shows forth? Can it dread his Majesty, the soul whose divine origin should inspire it with full confidence?" (*Serm. LXXXIII*, ii, 1)

155. St Bernard insists at different times on this consoling thought that even he who has been unfaithful to his God may hope for divine union. He reiterates it in his *Sermon LXXXIV* in such a touching manner that we should reproach ourselves if we did not reproduce it.

"Is it, then, thou, O my soul, who, after having abandoned thy first Spouse with whom thou wert so happy, having violated the faith sworn to him to run after other lovers, wouldst now, after having given thyself up to every disorder and become the object of their disdain, dare in thy shameless impudence to return to him who, in thy pride, thou didst scorn! What! Thou seekest light who art worthy only to dwell in darkness; thou pursuest the Spouse, thou who rather meritest chastisements than

kisses. It will be very surprising if thou dost not encounter a judge instead of a spouse. Happy is he who in listening to this discourse hears this answer from his soul: 'I do not fear, I love; and I should not have this feeling if I were not loved. He who is loved has nothing to fear. Those who do not love may fear and apprehend enmity, but I who love have no doubt that I am loved, and even more than I love. I do not dread to appear before the face of him whom I love. Why should I? He sought me when I was in that state. He touched me and gave me the assurance that he sought me. How could I elude his pursuit since I return his affection? Will he be irritated when I seek him who, when slighted by me, pretended that he did not notice it? No, he will not reject the soul that seeks him, he who sought it when it despised him. The spirit of the Word is full of sweetness. He has made me understand his extreme kindness, the zeal and affection he entertains for me. . . . Shall I hesitate, then, to seek him now that I feel assured of his mercy and persuaded that he only desires peace?'"

(2) *The union of contemplation, the heritage of the perfect.*

156. Contemplation, therefore, is accorded to those the fervour of whose love makes them desire heavenly joys, who are burning to be reunited to their beloved. But this favour is not accorded to all; it is the privilege of the special friends of the Word.

"He does not bestow this favour of his presence indiscriminately, even slightly, but only on the perfect, who, by a great love, an ardent desire, and the utmost constancy of affection, prove themselves worthy of the visit of the Word in the character of a Spouse. He who is devoid of these feelings, who is only moved to compunction at the remembrance of his sins, and who, speaking to God in the bitterness of his soul, says, 'Do not condemn me,' or else who continues to be still urged, disturbed, and tormented by concupiscence; such a one does not lay claim to the presence of the Spouse, but requires the physician, and, instead of embraces and kisses, will receive only oil and perfumes to dress his wounds" (*Serm. XXXII*, No. 3).

157. According to the saintly abbot, those who aspire to divine union, to the kiss of the Spouse, and who cherish the hope of obtaining this favour, already possess the

initial tokens of it. Such is not the case with beginners, who as yet do not have these lively desires and sweet hopes. They should compel themselves to produce them in their hearts, and revive their faith in the mercy and goodness of God; and thus they will pave the way for the reception one day of an alliance so precious (*Serm. LXXXIV*, No. 7).

"There are among monks," he continues (*Serm. LVII*, No. 11), "contemplatives who imitate Mary. But these are not the novices who, recently dead to sin, labour, with sighs and in fear of relapse, to heal their still fresh wounds. They are those who, after a longer co-operation with grace, have arrived at a better state and can allow their hearts to dilate.[1]

"Only those who love God sweetly, wisely, and ardently can merit to be called spouses" (*Serm. LXXIII*, No. 10).

"When you find anyone leaving all things to cling with longing desire to the Word, living for him, being led by him, and conceiving fruit by the Word, and producing it for him, then you can say of such a man, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,' and you can behold in such a soul a spouse of the Word. The heart of its Spouse reposes in it because he knows its fidelity, who for him has despised all things, regarding them all as dung in order to gain him" (*Serm. LXXXV*, No. 12).

But do all the perfect possess these precious gifts of light and fervour? Is contemplation the bourne at which the soul that is faithful must arrive? St Bernard thinks so; he declares that he who does not aim at contemplation will be always on the road without ever arriving at the end of his journey. He affirms that all holy souls experience the gifts of light and of mystical love.

Consequently, in his celebrated book *De Consideratione*, he distinguishes three kinds of considerations. The first he entitles *dispensative*, and is that "in which use is made of the senses and of sensible objects to merit the possession of God." The second he terms *estimative*, and is that in which "all things are examined and weighed with attention and prudence, seeking to know God." The third he names *speculative;* that is to say, *contemplative*, for these two words were employed indifferently by the authors of the Middle Ages. The consideration is specula-

[1] See here *Sermon XLVI,* No. 4, where St Bernard shows that a soul clinging to self-will cannot exercise the sweet familiarity of a spouse with Jesus, nor flatter itself that it will take its repose with him. This is the privilege of souls who do not seek their own interests, but those of the divine Spouse.

tive when the soul, "recollected in itself, is, *as far as the divine assistance permits*, detached from all earthly things *to contemplate God alone.*"

Evidently mystical contemplation[1] is here in question. "However," the holy doctor continues, "you will have already perceived that *this last is the fruit of the two others*, that these others, if they do not lead to this, are really not what they are said to be. And truly *the first, if it do not aim at this, sows much but gathers nothing; the second, in its turn, if it have not the third state in view, travels much but never arrives at the end of the journey.* Thus the viands cooked by the first and seasoned by the second are tasted by the third. . . ."

"These things (the divine perfections) are now known to us. Do we imagine that, on this account, they are ours? No, it is not by reasoning that we seize them, but by holiness; that is, if what is absolutely impalpable can be seized. If such a thing had no existence, why should the Apostle tell us to apprehend it with all the saints? Saints, therefore, apprehend these things. Would you know how? *If you are a saint you already possess them and consequently know them. If you are not a saint, become one, and then you will learn by experience.* Holy affections make a saint, and of these there are two—the holy fear of God and his holy love. The soul in perfect possession of these two affections makes use of them as of two arms to take hold of, to embrace, to clasp tightly, and to hold—and says: 'I held my beloved and I will not let him go (*tenui eum nec dimittam*)'" (l. V, ch. ii and xiv).

(3) *By what means we may attain to divine union.*

158. What means should we take in order to arrive at the state of perfection? St Bernard will tell us. After having first recommended, especially to those who have the care of souls, the cultivation of every virtue, after enunciating the famous sentence, "If you are wise you will prove yourself

[1] The following chapter proves this undoubtedly. "But you will say, 'You have already explained how we are to climb; it remains to you to say to where we are to climb.' You make a mistake in expecting me to tell you this; it is impossible to do so. Do you expect me to explain that which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive? God himself, says the Apostle, has revealed it to us by his Spirit, therefore that which is beyond our understanding cannot be taught by words, but is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. But that which language has no power to explain must be sought by consideration, asked by prayer, merited by good works, and obtained by purity."

to be a reservoir and not a canal," he indicates what are the treasures we should store up before we can give to others, and how we may acquire spiritual riches, without which our alms will be scant.—First we must correct our faults. "Before all, remove the tumour or ulcer that has formed on the wound, which prevents the recovery of health. Open, therefore, with the hot iron of a lively compunction the ulcer of an inveterate habit. Let the sorrow be sharp, but let it be soothed by the ointment of devotion; that is to say, by the intense joy inspired by the hope of pardon and by the victory gained over sin. Then can the soul return thanks to God and cry: 'Thou hast broken my bonds; I will sacrifice to thee,' etc. (Ps. cxv, 16, 17). Then is used the remedy of penance, and, like so many medicaments, fasts, watchings, prayer, and all the exercises suitable to penitents. Afterwards comes the time to work; then it is necessary for the soul to be sustained with the food of good works, which will prevent it relapsing. Our Lord has taught us the necessity of this food. He says: 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me' (John iv, 34). The works of penance should, then, be accompanied by these strengthening works. 'Before God,' it is written, 'alms shall be a great confidence' (Tob. iv, 12). Food excites thirst; one must also drink. To the nourishment of good works must be joined the beverage of prayer, which will work out in the conscience the good we have done and render it pleasing to God. In this prayer we draw 'the wine which cheers the heart of man,' the spiritual wine which quenches the thirst of the soul, diffuses a forgetfulness of carnal pleasures, and, flooding the most secret recesses of the withered conscience, enables it to digest the nourishment of good works, which it distributes to the different parts of the soul—strengthening faith, increasing hope, enlivening and regulating charity, and purifying the habits.

"When he has consumed the food of good works and drunk the beverage of prayer, what remains for the sick man to do but to pause and to give himself up to the repose of contemplation after the fatigue of action? He who sleeps in contemplation dreams of God; he does not yet see him face to face, but through a glass in a dark manner (1 Cor. xiii, 12). He burns with love for that God whom he divines and feels rather than sees, that God who passes before him by stealth with the rapidity of a spark which flashes and goes out, that God whom the soul hardly touches, even ever so lightly, and cries out: 'My soul hath desired thee in the night; yea, and with my spirit

within me in the morning early I will watch to thee' (Is. xxvi, 9). This love knows no rest; it is the attribute of the friend of the Spouse, and would necessarily burn and consume the faithful and prudent servant whom the Lord has set over his household. This love fills the heart and sets it on fire; it boils and overflows without danger; it superabounds and runs over (upon neighbours), and it can say: 'Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am not on fire?' (2 Cor. xi, 29). He must preach, he must produce fruit, he must perform wonders and miracles; when charity has entirely consumed him there is no longer room for vanity, because perfect charity is the *fulfilling of the law* (Rom. xiii) and the plenitude of the heart. *God is love* (1 John iv, 16), and nothing upon earth should be able to satisfy a creature made in the image of God but this God of love, who alone is greater. Without this love, whatever may be the virtues with which you are adorned, you will be exposed to danger if you put yourself forward; you may have all knowledge, you may give all your goods to the poor, you may deliver your body to be burnt, but without charity your heart will remain empty. This is the indispensable store you should amass before you are able to give and to distribute largess to others. Let us have, therefore: first, compunction; second, devotion; third, the works of penance; fourth, the works of mercy; fifth, the love of prayer; sixth, the practice of contemplation;[1] and seventh, the fulness of charity" (*Serm. XVIII*, Nos. 5 and 6).

159. St Bernard proceeds to show us the progressive steps of the soul in the spiritual life; he has already indicated the remote preparation for the state of divine union. Elsewhere he describes what should be the immediate preparation for the actual union.

In the first place, it is in prayer that the spouse receives the favour of a kiss; it is prayer, continues St Bernard, which precedes contemplation. Often, however, to obtain this, it requires perseverance in prayer, as it is not always at once that the soul succeeds in becoming united in a transport of love to its divine Spouse. It ought, there-

[1] The holy doctor places the exercise of contemplation before the plenitude of charity (brotherly love). This is the teaching of St Thomas: *est opus vitæ activæ quod ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur*. These words of St Thomas have been so frequently repeated that they have become an axiom. Fr. Lallemant has also only given the traditional doctrine when he said that without contemplative graces the active life remains imperfect. "Without contemplation there can be no advance in virtue, neither is it possible to help others to advance," etc. (VII Princ., ch. iv, a. 4).

fore, to persist in its efforts, and perseverance will obtain the desired result. "I have said: while the bride is speaking to the Spouse he suddenly appears, and in response to her desires gives her the kiss and fulfils in her these words of Holy Scripture: 'Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden from him the will of his lips' (Ps. xx, 3). The faithful who persevere in prayer have had proof of what I say. Often we appear before the altar with lukewarm and dry hearts, inattentive to prayer, but those who persevere feel suddenly that grace descends upon them, their hearts become filled, and torrents of devotion flood their inmost soul" (*Serm. IX*, 7).

160. The counsel given by the Fathers to renounce that which is sensible in order to be raised to the contemplation of God is followed by St Bernard: "May my soul, losing sight of the present things, strip itself, not only of the low desires of the flesh, but of all their images, and thus, becoming entirely pure, may live with those of a like purity. I believe that it is by this complete stripping of the soul and this forsaking of self[1] is specially conveyed the idea of contemplation, for to cease being a slave to the passions during life is a human virtue, but to prevent the domination of corporeal images, even when beholding them, is the purity of the angels. Nevertheless, both are the gifts of God—freedom from self and the being raised above self.[2] But in the first the elevation is slight; in the second much higher, and there is a more complete escape from self. Happy is he who can say: 'Lo, I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in the wilderness' (Ps. liv, 8). He will not be content to go out, but will go far off to find rest. You have forsaken the allurements of the flesh, and no longer obey its concupiscence, nor are attracted by its charms; you have gone out, you have forsaken yourself, but you are not yet really far off if you have not triumphed over the imagination and the representations of corporeal objects by the purity of your heart. Until then, do not think of repose. You will deceive yourself if, without this victory, you imagine you can find a place of rest or a solitude apart, the clearness of light, or the sanctuary of peace. But show me one who has arrived at this degree of purity, and I will not hesitate to proclaim that he will enjoy peace, and may exclaim: 'Turn, O my soul, into thy rest, for the Lord hath been bountiful to thee'" (*Serm. LII*, No. 5).

[1] *Talis excessus.*

[2] *Utrumque excedere, utrumque teipsum transcendere.*

"He is great who, considering the use of the senses in the light of a loan drawn from the general funds of a city, seeks to expend it for his own salvation and for that of others. He is no less great who makes of it a footstool to raise himself to things invisible. Of these two classes, the second is the most pleasant and the first the most useful; the one procures the most happiness, the other exacts the greater virtue. But he is the greatest of all who, disdaining altogether the use of the senses and of sensible objects, at any rate as much as human frailty will permit, has the habit of flying away on the wings of contemplation towards these sublime heights, not by a gradual ascent, but by sudden and unexpected flights"[1] (*De Consid.*, l. V, ch. ii, 1, 2).

161. On these sublime heights the soul, struck with the greatness of God, is overcome with an ardent love for him, and finds great strength for the practice of virtue. This is why the Fathers, as we have seen, recommend so earnestly the acquisition of a high idea of the divine perfections. St Bernard is of the same opinion. Side by side he places two souls, the one who, in considering our divine Saviour, does not lose sight of his divinity, with the other, who is specially struck with the human element in him; and he ranks the former far above the latter. "Take notice that the love of the heart is in some sort carnal, since it is a movement of the human heart, especially as caused by the consideration of the human nature of Jesus Christ, and of that which he did or willed in the flesh. He who feels this love is easily touched by discourses treating of this matter; no other subject gives him so much pleasure, no other reading holds his attention, no other thought is so frequent with him, no meditation moves him so pleasantly, in such sort that the holocaust of his prayer is bedewed as with the blood of a victim. During prayer the sacred image of the Man-God appears before him, either newly born, or reposing on his Mother's breast, or preaching, or dying, or rising from the dead and ascending into heaven; and whatever may be the circumstance presented to his mind, it excites a love of virtue in his heart, it impels him to purify himself from the vices of the flesh, to fly from pleasure and to regulate his desires. Such is, as I think, the principal reason which has determined the invisible God to take a visible form in the flesh, to converse with men as man. He willed to turn the affections of these carnal creatures, who could love only in a carnal manner,

[1] *Inopinatis excessibus.*

to a salutary love, and so to raise them by degrees to an entirely spiritual love. Those who cried, 'Behold, we have left all things and have followed thee' (Matt. xix, 27), did not ascend higher. They had certainly left all things for love of his bodily presence, and they could not hear without pain of the approach of his sacred Passion, and it was even with profound sorrow that they thought of his glorious Ascension which was to follow his death. Jesus Christ reproached them for this: 'Because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart'' (John xvi, 6). Nevertheless, the grace of his bodily presence cured them of carnal love.

"He put before them a higher degree of love when he said: 'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing' (John vi, 63). He who said, 'If we have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know him so no longer' (2 Cor. v, 16), had already attained this degree. The prophet also when he said, 'The breath of our mouth, Christ the Lord, is taken in our sins, to whom we said: Under thy shadow we shall live among the Gentiles' (Lament. iv, 20), was in the same state, for, when he added the last clause he was speaking in the name of beginners, who, not being yet strong enough to bear the heat of the sun, are obliged to lie down in the shade, and regale themselves with earthly pleasures as they are unable to take hold of those of the Spirit of God.

"Although the love of the human nature of Jesus Christ is an excellent gift of the Holy Ghost, I still call it carnal compared to that of those who not only appreciate the Word made flesh, but also the Word of wisdom, the Word of justice, the Word of truth, the Word of sanctity, piety, virtue, and of all that relates to the Word. And Jesus Christ is all this, since God has given him to us to be our *wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption* (1 Cor. i, 30). Do you imagine that the Christian, although penetrated with a pious compassion for the sufferings of Jesus Christ, full of compunction, and moved by the recollection of the Passion and by the sweetness of this devotion, inclined by the virtue of these reflections to salutary and holy works, can be compared to him who is always inflamed with zeal for justice, who seeks truth with ardour, burns with a desire for wisdom, whose happiness consists in leading a holy, well-regulated life, who is ashamed of vanity, abhors detraction, detests envy and pride, who not only flies human glory, but despises and contemns it, who has a horror of impurity, both of the senses and the heart, and repulses, as if naturally, all that

is evil, and embraces all that is good. Compare the affections of these two men, and you will perceive that the first compared to the second seems only to love in a carnal manner" (*Serm. XX*, Nos. 6, 7, 8).

(4) *In what divine union consists.*

162. The style of the holy doctor is rich and full of images. We have known him to employ very different expressions to explain the divine union. He tells us of the kiss of contemplation, of the visits of the Bridegroom, of the slumber of the soul, of the transports carrying the soul out of itself, and his explanation of these things shows us what he means. Let us take notice also of the other traits which will further enlighten us and make us better understand how St Bernard regarded this desirable state of divine union.

163. The holy abbot very clearly explains that in this state the Spirit of God acts both on the intellect to enlighten it, and on the will to inflame it with love. "The doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit is proposed, less to excite curiosity than to stimulate charity. It is, therefore, with reason that the bride, seeking him whom her soul loves, does not allow herself to be guided either by the senses or by useless and inquisitive reasonings, but asks for a kiss; in other words, for the Holy Spirit, from whom she expects the gift of knowledge and the sweetness of grace. Knowledge drawn from this kiss is received with love, since a kiss is a pledge of love; but knowledge unaccompanied by charity only puffs up, and does not proceed from the kiss. Those animated by zeal for God, unaccompanied by knowledge, must no longer lay claim to it, for the favour of the kiss comprises these two things—light and unction. The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, like the bee that provides both wax and honey, has the privilege of lighting the torch of knowledge and of bestowing the gift of grace. He, therefore, who takes hold of truth without charity, or who has charity without knowledge, cannot flatter himself with having received the kiss in which there is neither error nor lukewarmness. Therefore the bride must make ready her two lips, her reason, the seat of the intellect, and her will, the seat of wisdom, in order to be able at once to receive the double grace of this very holy kiss" (*Serm. VIII*, No. 6).

"If, by the help of prayer, anyone could obtain the power of taking flight from himself[1] to enter into the

[1] Here St Bernard again makes use of the word *excessus* (see above, No. 62).

secrets of divine charity, from which he would issue filled with an ardent love, burning with zeal for justice, and replenished with fervour in all spiritual duties and exercises, so that he could exclaim, 'My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out' (Ps. xxxviii, 4), and if, in this abundance, he show outwardly an excessive joy, it can justly be said of him that he has been in *the cellar of wine*. There are, indeed, in holy contemplation two kinds of ecstasy—one of the intellect and the other of the heart, one of light, the other of fervour, one of knowledge, the other of devotion. Now, pious feelings, a heart on fire with love and steeped in a holy devotion, a spirit full of fiery zeal, can only come from the 'cellar of wine,' and whoever comes from prayer enriched with an abundance of these favours can say with truth: 'The King brought me into the cellar of wine'" (*Serm. XLIX*, 24).

164. Thus the union which takes place in this mysterious meeting between God and the soul is a union of love produced by the will,[1] taken possession of by grace, and closely united to the divine will. "I, dust and ashes, supported by the authority of Holy Scripture, fear not to say that I am one spirit with God, if my own personal experience teaches me that I am united to God like those who live in charity and in whom God dwells, who are sustained by God and consumed by him.[2] Of this union it is said: 'He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit' (1 Cor. vi, 17).

"God and man, existing with their separate will and substance, do not blend substance, but unite their wills. Their union is a communion of will, their oneness of charity. Happy union! . . . He who had experienced it cried out: 'It is good for me to adhere to my God' (Ps. lxxii, 28). Yes, good, if you completely attach yourself. Who, however, is completely attached to God if not he who dwells in God as a being beloved by him, and attracts God to himself by the power of love? When they are perfectly united, and this they are when a mutual and intimate charity makes them one,[3] then let us say it boldly, God is in the man and the man in God"[4] (*Serm. LXXI*, Nos. 6 and 10).

[1] The word "will," with the ancient authors, means not only the determining faculty, but the loving faculty, the intellectual appetite, to use the scholastic expression.

[2] *Manducantes Deum et manducati a Deo.* See the commentary made by Tauler on this passage of St Bernard in the first and second Sermon for the feast of the Holy Spirit (*Traduction Noël*, t. iii, pp. 136, 162.)

[3] *Inviscerati alterutrum sibi.*

[4] Cf. *Serm. LXXXIII*, Nos. 2 and 3.

165. The contemplative passes through many different states, described by St Bernard from his personal experience in his *Sermon XXIII.* Sometimes the contemplative experiences at the same time two contrary feelings—of content and of an uneasy eagerness. He enjoys the light vouchsafed to him, but is hungering to receive more; he has an imperfect vision of the greatness of God and the sweetness of intercourse with him, but that which he perceives makes him long all the more to understand better that world of light and love. "This is what the bride so admirably expresses in the following words, wherein she explains the delight and agitation of this contemplation. She admits that she sleeps and that her heart watches; that is to say, that she experiences the calm of a sweet embrace and of a peaceful wonder. At the same time she watches, because she feels an uneasy curiosity and the fatigue of a laborious exercise" (No. 3).

At other times the contemplative receives great enlightenment on the formidable justice of God, and he trembles with fear (Nos. 12, 13, 14). Often, also, he is marvellously enlightened about the divine mercy, and then sees in God a Spouse full of goodness and tenderness; and his heart swells with an immense joy and a peaceful confidence, which is true rest.

"The peace of God is communicated to all; to behold this peace is in itself a repose. God is like a king who, after long and difficult discussions on public affairs, has dismissed the crowd, broken away from the cares of government, returned at night to the palace and entered his private apartment with some confidential friends. He remains there tranquilly and in retirement. His divine heart enjoys a delightful peace in finding himself alone with his friends. If any one of you has the happiness of being taken sometimes into this secret place, this sanctuary of God, and to be hidden therein, freed from the torment of the senses, from painful cares, from remorse, and, above all, from images and corporeal representations difficult to drive away, such a one, on his return to us, could glory in saying: 'The king hath brought me into his storeroom.' Without rashness I dare to state that this is precisely the favour which causes the joy of the bride. At the same time, the King has many storerooms, and of the three to which I have drawn attention this one only is the abode of peace, for, as I have already clearly demonstrated in the first,[1] only a partial repose is enjoyed, and the second[2]

[1] That in which the Spouse says: "I sleep but my heart watches."
[2] That in which the soul learns to know the infinite justice of God.

does not allow even of this. In the first the Bridegroom appears admirable, but he awakens in the soul a strong desire to know him better. In the second he shows himself to be terrible, and dismays our poor human infirmity. But in the third the Spouse appears neither terrifying nor formidable; on the contrary, he deigns to show himself there full of kindness, goodness, serenity, sweetness, gentleness, and unfathomable mercy towards those who fear him" (*Serm. XXIII*, No. 16).

166. St Bernard understood these alternations. The greater number of contemplatives have to pass through them. Perhaps they aspire to a complete repose, for ever exempt from trials and labour,[1] or that the accomplishment of all their duties, even of those that formerly seemed painful and bitter to them, should become full of charm and sweetness. St Bernard says: "This is the favour asked by him who said, 'Forgive me that I may be refreshed' (*Remitte mihi ut refrigerer*); that is to say, till when shall I be subjected to these fatigues and sorrows, and overwhelmed the livelong day by death? Grant me some peace and rest. To a state so perfect, however, it seems to me that few arrive in this life"[2] (*Serm. III on the Circumcision*, No. 10).

The holy doctor frequently returns to the alternate presence and absence of the Word as Spouse, and he admirably describes these states.

The man who earnestly desires to be united to Christ will find his wishes fulfilled, "but only for a time, and a very short time."[3]

"After having been sought by him, and after having surrendered himself to his watchings, prayers, efforts, and tears, the Word vanishes at the moment he imagines that

[1] *Diem serenissimam, sabbatum mentis, in quo tanquam emeritus miles, in laboribus universis vivas absque labore . . . et quod prius cum amaritudine et coactione tui spiritus faciebas, de caetero jam* cum summa dulcedine *peragas et delectatione.*

[2] Not even David, for the words quoted here by St Bernard are taken from Ps. xxxviii. If it were really a question here of contemplation in general, as some authors aver, it must be admitted, what would be more than strange, that, in St Bernard's opinion, David himself was not a contemplative, that he had aspired in vain to contemplation. And yet in *Serm. XXIII*, No. 13, St Bernard styles the author of the Psalms the great contemplative. One part of this text has actually been quoted as one of the principal arguments to prove that contemplation is rare, and "supposes a special vocation which the greater number of souls who make mental prayer do not possess." Is it necessary to insist that this thesis, besides being in direct contradiction to the doctrine of St Bernard, does not follow from anything said here by the holy doctor?

[3] Read *Sermons XXXI* and *LXXIV*, in which St Bernard describes in such a touching manner the visits and the absences of the Beloved.

he can retain him. He gives himself again to his desire and eagerness, permits himself to be seized, but not bound, and suddenly escapes again from the hands that have made him captive. If the pious soul should entreat him with prayers and tears, he comes again and does not refuse the petition of the lips which invoke him; but he soon disappears, and only returns after the most ardent appeals. Thus, even while still in the body, the soul can become inundated with joy at the presence of the Spouse, and, without entirely possessing him, trembles at his visits; but these alternations produce sadness" (*Serm. XXXII*, No. 2).

167. We will finish by citing a page in which St Bernard shows us the burning zeal which is the fruit of contemplation, and the way in which the contemplative intermingles action and contemplation.

"True and perfect contemplation has that in itself which, while inflaming the heart with a divine fire, fills it at the same time with such an earnest zeal and strong desire of gaining other souls to God that they may love him as well, that it willingly exchanges the repose of contemplation for the work of preaching. Having accomplished this, the contemplative returns to contemplation with all the more eagerness the more fruit he has acquired in quitting it. In the same way, after having enjoyed the delights of contemplation, he consecrates himself again to making fresh conquests. In the midst of these incessant changes, however, he wavers; he fears in this diversity of affections and emotions to attach himself too much to this or that, or to be diverted even but slightly from the divine will. This was, perhaps, what Job experienced when he said: 'If I lie down to sleep I shall say: When shall I arise? And again I shall look for the evening.' That is to say, in resting I reproach myself with neglecting work, and in my occupations I accuse myself of disturbing my repose.[1] Behold this holy man hesitating sorrowfully between a fruitful labour and the repose of contemplation. Although engaged in good works, he regrets it as if he were acting badly, and at every instant he seeks with sighs to know the will of God. In situations such as this, however, the only remedy, the sole refuge, is prayer and frequent aspirations to God, imploring him to deign to reveal to us, always, what he wishes us to do, and for how long and with what energy we are to perform each action"[2] (*Serm. LVII*, No. 9).

[1] Cf. *Sermon XXIII.*

[2] Being unable to quote all the texts which establish the traditional doctrine of the unitive life, I must forego giving extracts from the

2. *Hugh of St Victor.*

168. Having studied the doctrine of St Bernard, let us see what two illustrious friends of this great saint teach us, Hugh and Richard, the first a Canon Regular († 1142), the second Prior of the Abbey of St Victor, Paris, who have always been justly classed among the masters of the spiritual life. They were as remarkable for their eminent piety as for science and learning. Hugh was called another Augustine. He has left us many theological works and commentaries on Holy Scripture.

169. In order to describe the work of perfection accomplished in the faithful soul, Hugh makes use of a comparison which St John of the Cross borrows later.[1]

"When fire is set to green wood there is at first nothing to be seen but thick smoke, and what little flame there is can hardly be perceived through the thick clouds, but gradually, as the wood dries, the smoke becomes less dense, and the flames rise and spread until all the wood catches fire. It crackles and still seems to struggle, but the flame gains the victory, penetrating and transforming it while communicating to it its own nature. The combustion now takes its course, and soon there is no longer any wood, but only fire; then the crackling ceases, the sparks no longer fly, and the devouring flames, finding no strange element to combat, complete the work of assimilation quietly and silently.

"The heart which is still sensual is like green wood. If any spark of fear or love falls on it and inflames it, its unrestrained passions resist, and this causes much pain and trouble; it is essentially necessary to disperse the thick smoke.

"Little by little the soul becomes strengthened, love increases and becomes warmer, its flame is more brilliant; the troubles disappear, the spirit enters into contemplation of the truth. Finally, under the influence of this continued

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celebrated letter to the Brethren of Mont-Dieu inserted in the works of St Bernard. The author, a contemporary of the saint, divides the religious life into three degrees: the beginning in which the sensible predominates; the advanced, in which reason enlightened by faith has the mastery, and perfection. The third he calls the spiritual state, and by the way he describes it, there can be no doubt that he means the mystical or contemplative state. After having given a beautiful description of it, he says: "This is the end, the aim, the price of the struggles of the solitary, the recompense of his labours, and the consolation for his sorrows. It is man's perfection and his true wisdom which embraces and comprehends all virtues."

[1] Dark Night, l. II, ch. x.

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contemplation, the human heart becomes full of divine love, the flame of charity entirely penetrates it, and then, without sound or struggle, in a profound peace, it ends by becoming completely consumed by love.

"Thus, therefore, at first, in the midst of the dangers of temptation, we must have recourse to meditation in which the flame is as though hidden in smoke. Later begins the contemplation of the truth; this is the flame cleared of smoke and burning brightly. At last the truth is found, love attains perfection, the soul, freed from self, seeks only God. He is all in all to it; it rests in his love and finds therein peace and happiness" (*In Eccl., Hom. I*).

170. According to him, then, contemplation marks the summit of the spiritual life. But what is contemplation? Hugh gives an explanation of it that has frequently been reproduced by the masters. "There are," he says, "three ways of considering spiritual things—by thought, by meditation, and by contemplation. When the mind is struck by an idea which presents itself unsought, and by which it is not arrested, then it is a simple thought; but if this thought engages the mind for any length of time it is a meditation, especially if the mind returns to it, seeks to fathom it and to discover all that it contains. But should the soul with one glance embrace at one and the same time the many different objects that she has to consider, then this is contemplation.[1]

"In meditation, one single truth is considered to find in it something that has not been noticed before. In contemplation everything is seen at a glance; nothing is sought, everything is possessed; it is no longer necessary to fathom the truth, it is seen in full daylight.

"There are two kinds of contemplation. That of beginners has relation to creatures. This is what causes the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes to say: 'Vanity of vanities.' By dint of examining all the evils under the sky, he has learnt to know them, and, contemplating this mass of evil, he makes this cry which has become celebrated. But the contemplation which has God for its object is quite another thing. This belongs to the perfect; study and reflection are no longer sufficient; holiness of life is also necessary" (*In Eccl., Hom. I*).

171. Hugh of St Victor develops elsewhere the same doctrine. "The grace of contemplation not only purifies from every earthly attachment, but also sanctifies and inflames with a love of heavenly things. He who, thanks to the light and inspirations of the Holy Spirit, has been

[1] *Cf.* St Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, l. VI, ch. v.

raised to contemplation, receives a pledge of future happiness wherein he will enjoy a contemplation that will be eternal. If, however, contemplation of the truth be the aim, then not only must bad habits be avoided, but even useless thoughts. There are many people who can keep quiet exteriorly, but, for want of peace of mind, cannot be said to accomplish the wish of the prophet—'Be still and see that I am God' (Ps. xlv, 11). Their bodies are at rest, but their minds are active and wander to all sorts of objects, and on that account they cannot discover how sweet the Lord is, how good the God of Israel is to those of an upright heart. . . .

"Nothing is more pleasant, nothing more useful, than the grace of contemplation. . . . To know God is the fulness of knowledge, but to acquire this knowledge of God deep contemplation is more useful than study, sighs serve better than reasonings, tears better than beautiful thoughts, prayer better than reading, the consideration of heavenly things better than the care of things of earth" (*De Anima*, l. III, ch. xlix).

172. "In the lives of the just there can be said to be four degrees through which they must pass to attain perfection —doctrinal learning, meditation, prayer, and good works. In the fifth place comes contemplation, which appears to be the result of the four others, and is as a foretaste of future happiness. . . . Of these five degrees, the first, which is the study of doctrine, belongs to beginners; the last, which is contemplation, belongs to the perfect. We ought therefore," he continues, "to apply ourselves to reading, to meditation, to prayer, and good works, and from all this, after having painfully laboured, will come the recompense, when we shall receive the light from on high, and taste and see how sweet is the Lord. Thus will be realized what has been said: By prayer we seek, by contemplation we find. And those who have raised themselves by these successive degrees in this way attain perfection" (*Erudit. didasc.*, l. V, ch. ix).

3. *Richard of St Victor.*

173. Richard of St Victor († 1173) was a disciple of Hugh, and was even more celebrated than he as a mystic. Not only did he expose his doctrine cursorily, and when a certain text made an allusion to it necessary, but he regulated and reduced all his teaching to a science. His is, we believe, the first really theological work which treats of matters of high spirituality. Clement of Alexandria had

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indeed published a whole work, but it was a collection of detached thoughts; while the other Fathers had connected their teaching with commentaries on the sacred Scriptures. Cassian wrote in a more didactic style; nevertheless, his *Conferences* were more in the nature of an excellent book for spiritual reading. Richard drew up a whole body of doctrine, and as to the knowledge acquired by the study of the Fathers he added his own personal experience, the works he composed were of great value, and were appreciated as much as they deserved. For centuries the most illustrious writers have cited him as a master whose authority is universally recognized. He is thus one of those authors the most to be studied if we wish to become acquainted with the mystical doctrine of the Middle Ages. We will recapitulate his doctrine.

(1) *On the destruction of evil, and progress in virtue.*

174. To overcome evil and advance in virtue, the first thing necessary is to learn to despise the world (*Tract. I*, ch. v) and then to despise oneself (ch. iv). To despise the world is to come out of Egypt; but to despise oneself is to leave the desert; it means the last step taken to enter the promised land. This last step is a difficult one to take; it is difficult to attain to a complete contempt of self (ch. xii). To cross the Jordan, had not the waters of this river, instead of following their natural course towards the lower ground, to turn back towards their source? In the same way, to enter the promised land one must not only abstain from sin, but, changing the natural course of human affections which leads to lower objects, ascend to our source, which is God (ch. xiii).

Is this possible? The Ark of the Covenant performed this miracle. The Ark of the Covenant, which will work the same miracle in the souls of the faithful, is the highest of all graces—that of contemplation. Is not the human intellect, bright with the light of divine wisdom, and irradiated with the fires of heavenly inspiration, like the holy Ark which was brilliant with gold? Does it not contain, even as did the holy Ark, the sacred deposit of divine treasures, that intelligence of those who are truly spiritual, who possess a knowledge of the most holy mysteries and guard it as a very sacred possession?

Why is this Ark an ark of the *Covenant?* It is because this grace of contemplation is given as a pledge of love, as a token of friendship by him who loves those who love him, and who addresses these tender words to them: "I

will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends: because all things, whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you" (John xv, 15; *Tr. II*, ch. i).

175. This precious favour is greatly to be desired[1] (ch. v[2]). We must also not be content with a mere glance at the corruption of our nature, but must insist upon it until the love of the things of this world grows less, and the appreciation and desire for the higher things increase. Banish the multitude of natural affections, and when this crowd has dispersed, then will come the Ark of the Covenant.

There are many who would deserve to enter the land of promise, but cannot enter with their holy ark on account of some natural attachment which they have retained. We must also chastise the body and bring it into subjection to prevent it being an obstacle to our progress, but we must not weaken it and make it suffer in a way to prevent it practising spiritual exercises. Many[3] have made this mistake, and have afterwards taken more care of themselves than was reasonable. Only those who have kept within the bounds of moderation, knowing that they must not overstep them, and who have tasted the divine sweetness, can bring their holy ark into the land of promise (ch. vii).

176. We must also practise meditation before we can be admitted to contemplation; it is, in fact, through meditation that we feel a desire for heavenly blessings; and no one can obtain this favour without a very ardent desire for it (ch. xi).

Lastly, the good Prior explains, as did Hugh of St Victor, the difference between meditation and contemplation. In the first, he says, we are trained to virtue, and in the second confirmed in it; this is why we should apply ourselves to one as well as to the other in order to make progress.

(2) *On forming the interior man.*

177. The first care of a strong soul is to overcome its inclinations; the second is to master its thoughts, to rule the imagination; and when this has been accomplished then will the grace of contemplation be received (ch. ii).

All the same, it must not be supposed that contemplation is the result of our own efforts; it remains even then a

[1] *Prius oportet promissionis terram tenere per desiderium quam per intellectum.*

[2] *Cf.* ch. viii.

[3] Times have greatly changed.

gratuitous gift. God bestows his gifts, not because they are due to us, but that we may improve ourselves and be useful to others (ch. xix).

Benjamin Minor, or On the Preparation of the Soul for Contemplation.

178. In this work Richard of St Victor treats of the way to prepare for contemplation, of which Benjamin is the figure.

It is difficult for a soul still carnally inclined, and new to things spiritual, to be raised to an understanding of invisible things and to keep the mind settled in contemplation, everything which presents itself being material and clothed in sensible forms. What, then, is the soul to do? It must make use of the imagination to represent objects from which useful lessons can be drawn (ch. xiv).

In this manner the soul can resist bad temptations by picturing eternal punishment (ch. xx) and urge itself to the practice of virtue by the thought of a future reward (ch. xxii).

Afterwards it will become necessary to repress sensuality by abstinence, and to bear tribulations with patience and firmness (ch. xxv and xxvi).

Nevertheless, there will be no success in the suppression of sensual vices if the wanderings of the imagination are unrestrained (ch. xxvii).

Nor can this vagabond power be mastered unless the soul be faithful in keeping guard over the senses (ch. xxxii).

After having in this way vanquished all the enemies and made peace with the inhabitants, it seems to me that there is no longer any obstacle to prevent this mystical city—in other words, this faithful soul—from experiencing what this peace is, which is above all feeling, and from finding out how abundant is the hidden sweetness that God has in store for those who love him. A hidden sweetness, because those who remain attached to the world have no knowledge of it (ch. xxxvi); a salutary sweetness, because it gives strength to the soul and at the same time keeps it humble (ch. xxxix).

179. The author proceeds to describe the different virtues, of which each of the children of Jacob is a type.

Joseph, according to him, represents discretion; it is thus that he designates that prudence and wisdom by which one knows oneself perfectly and can direct oneself and others (ch. lxx). A long time after Joseph came Benjamin; for the mind must be exercised in self-knowledge

before being raised by contemplation to the knowledge of God (ch. lxxi).

There can be nothing more pleasant nor agreeable, nor anything more salutary, than the sweetness of contemplation. Rachel (the type of reason) understood its value, and with what eagerness did she not desire it. She was not unaware that this blessing was above her powers, that she could not obtain it by her own efforts, that it is a gift of God and not a reward; but this did not appease her desire, for, after all, it is only to those who ardently desire it that this favour is accorded (ch. lxxiii).

The contemplative does not always apply himself to the consideration of eternal things; he sometimes gives his attention to temporal matters, to examining them, and thus leaves contemplation to return to meditation. In fact, on occasions does he not make wise reflections on the designs of God, on the means for acquiring, preserving, and increasing the true riches? When, however, he considers invisible benefits he does so with the pure understanding—that is to say, without any mixture of sensible images—and this is contemplation. Meditation frequently leads to contemplation, and thus contemplation may succeed meditation and meditation contemplation (ch. lxxxvii).

(4) *Benjamin Major, or On Contemplation.*

180. The author begins by the praise of contemplation.

What is this better part that Mary has chosen, if it is not to remain at the feet of Jesus in the sweet peace of contemplation? She listened to his words and applied herself to the contemplation of truth. This is the portion of the elect and of the perfect, which shall never be taken from them. It is a most desirable grace, because those who receive it are not only purified, but also sanctified. In fact, nothing is so purifying as contemplation; it purifies from all worldly affection; and nothing inflames the heart so much with a love of heavenly treasures; it inspires the soul with contempt of the world and makes it holy by giving the love of God (ch. i).

181. The author, explaining what he means by contemplation, marks the difference between simple thought, meditation, and contemplation.

The same truths can be the object of our thoughts, of our meditation, of our contemplation; they are only perceived in a simple thought, examined deeply in meditation, admired in contemplation. Thought travels aimlessly and is carried here or there indifferently. Meditation knows

where it is going; it does not advance without effort and great mental attention; but contemplation with free and unfettered flight follows with surprising agility the impulsion which carries it along. Thought creeps, meditation walks, or rather runs, contemplation flies and at pleasure hovers in the heights. In simple thought there is neither pain nor profit, in meditation there is both pain and profit, in contemplation there is profit without pain. Simple thought has its rise in the imagination, meditation is brought about in the mind, contemplation proceeds from the pure understanding. Thought passes from one thing to another without connection, meditation prefers to adhere to one subject, contemplation at one glance comprehends a multitude of objects. The understanding of the contemplative certainly has a particular power to enable it to extend from the lowest to the highest things, to grasp the most inscrutable, or again, without effort or delay, to scrutinize innumerable objects. There is, therefore, no being too low to be the object of contemplation. Nevertheless, properly speaking, the term "contemplation" is reserved for that which has for object the most lofty truths, in which the pure understanding is exercised (ch. iii).

It can be defined as an act of the mind considering freely and taking in at a glance the acts of Wisdom, and remaining lost in admiration; or, according to a great theologian of our own times,[1] "the free and searching glance of the soul, embracing at one and the same time the different objects that ought to be considered."

It frequently happens that among our thoughts we may be struck by one in particular; then, in the desire to understand better the object presented to us, we dwell upon it, try to fathom it, and thus from a simple thought it becomes in this way a meditation. In a similar manner, when in meditation the truth which we have studied for a long time becomes clear, the soul is happy and remains arrested for a certain time in mute admiration, and the meditation thus becomes contemplation. This sustained admiration which is so sweet is, in fact, the real nature of contemplation (ch. iv).

182. What are the different kinds of contemplation? (ch. vi).

The first kind of contemplation turns towards visible things, and is limited to admiring their beauty, pleasantness, and variety, and the power, wisdom, and munificence of their Creator.

[1] Hugh of St Victor.

The second kind is concerned with the same objects, but with the exercise of the imagination is combined that of the reason, for admiration is extended to the order, arrangement, end, and aim of each creature.

The third kind is that by which, through the symbol of visible things, the soul is raised to the admiration of the invisible.

The fourth kind is when, by the understanding of our own spiritual nature, we are raised to the contemplation of heavenly spirits. In this no use is made of the imagination.

The fifth kind of contemplation is above, but not contrary to, reason; it has for object revealed truths that the reason cannot altogether comprehend and that it cannot entirely fathom. For example, what faith teaches us about the divine nature, its simplicity, etc. The soul has to rise far above itself to attain to these sublime objects of contemplation.

The sixth kind has in view truths which are outside and even apparently contrary to reason, such as those which we must believe concerning the Trinity of the divine Persons.

Such are the different kinds of contemplation necessary for whosoever wishes to attain perfect knowledge; such are the six wings which raise us above the ground and carry us nigh unto heaven. Do not imagine yourself to be perfect if one or other of these is wanting (ch. x).

183. In the books that follow the author demonstrates the lessons that can be drawn from the consideration of the different beings that form the subject of the first four kinds of contemplation.

In the fourth book he comes to what, according to him, is more rightly the subject of true contemplation,[1] and in which, he remarks, those who are really spiritual take pleasure, and to which they apply themselves with a holy eagerness.

The cherubim extend their wings, which means that those who are really spiritual always and everywhere sigh for contemplation. We should always be prepared to receive divine light, always ready to open our wings to the breath of the Holy Spirit of God, and when that divine breath has dispersed all the clouds that darken our spirit, and the sun has appeared in all its brightness, then we can ascend towards the heights and contemplate the eternal

[1] Also St Thomas (II-II, Q. 180, a. 4 *ad* 3), explaining this doctrine of Richard of St. Victor, looks upon these preliminary considerations less as contemplation than as steps leading to divine contemplation.

splendour. It is not only the blessings of this present life that should give us objects for contemplation, but also those of the life to come, for it is to excite our desires and to enkindle the flame of love that the favour of contemplation is bestowed upon us (ch. x).

184. The visits of grace work in diverse ways. Elias, standing in the cave, waited; then came a violent wind, an earthquake, and fire, followed by a gentle breeze. In the gentle breeze the Lord was present; thus, after great trials, great anguish, an unexpected peace takes possession of the heart and produces a great calm, and this is undoubtedly a visit of grace.

Abraham, seated in his dwelling, hearing the voice of the Lord, rushed to meet him, made him enter, and offered him food. He who, going out of himself,[1] contemplates the supreme wisdom in all its simplicity and nakedness, without sensible shape or form, may be said to leave his dwelling and to go to meet the Lord face to face (ch. xi).

We must always, therefore, be prepared for the visit of the Lord, and not make him wait when he presents himself (ch. xiii).

But unfortunately there are very few who are thus always prepared for the reception of grace, even among religious, by reason of their carelessness or of a desire for knowledge that is more human than holy (ch. xiv).

It is difficult always to keep perfectly recollected and to have no other desire but to contemplate the Divinity.

True love desires to be alone with the beloved. Therefore, before the Lord knocks at the door, drive out all importunate distractions, otherwise you will be in danger of keeping him waiting. The importunate distractions which will prevent the enjoyment of the divine friendship are idle thoughts and human affections (ch. xv).

185. Until these are expelled the soul will expect the God whom it loves, but will not be able to go out to meet him. To receive the visit of the Lord interiorly is easier than to go out to meet him when he calls, and to be drawn towards him. To re-enter into oneself and to dwell alone with the Beloved is to forget all exterior things and to give oneself up to the delights of divine love. To go out of oneself is to forsake self, to forget self, and to allow oneself to be raised to divine contemplation. . . . But the Beloved of our souls must be allowed to enter into their inmost recesses, and we cannot flatter ourselves that this has been effected if there should remain anything beside him in which we seek joy and consolation. For whoever seeks

[1] *Per mentis excessum extra semetipsum ductus.*

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or even accepts human consolation may love God above all, but does not love him alone.

And those who do not welcome the Lord into the depths of their hearts, how can they either wish or be able to forsake themselves to follow him to the summit? Besides, it is a sign that they have not reached the height of love if they have not earned the right to these transports of contemplation. The manifestation of these divine secrets is the proof that our divine Friend gives us of his affection. "I will not now call you servants, but friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father I have made known to you" (John xv, 15). If, therefore, we desire to experience these holy joys, let us try to love God with an intense and sovereign love, and let us not pass one hour without greatly desiring the happiness of divine contemplation[1] (ch. xvi).

186. Those who apply themselves often to the contemplation of spiritual beings, of the divine nature, and of the holy Trinity receive great light (ch. xxi).

These different subjects can either be considered during the transports of contemplation, in which, carried away by the impulse of love, the soul forgets the miseries of this life and forgets self; or else they can be considered more calmly with a great concentration of mind, and a knowledge of them be gained by these reflections and efforts (ch. xxii).

As to these contemplative transports, some experience them suddenly without seeking them; others prepare for them and obtain them by their efforts, with the help, however, of divine grace (ch. xxiii).

187. In the fifth book Richard of St Victor treats of the different degrees of contemplation.

Three things help us to advance in contemplation—divine grace, our own efforts, and the teaching we receive; and this is quite correct, whether the contemplation be that which occurs without elevation of the mind, or that in which the mind is raised (ch. i).

Contemplation may be of different characters according to the manner in which it is produced. It is produced in three ways. First, by a dilation of the mind, whereby the soul sees more clearly and has a more extended view, although so far nothing is beyond the range of its powers.[2]

The second sort of contemplation is produced by the elevation of the mind, which, enlightened by divine light,

[1] This ch. xvi is taken in a great measure word for word from ch. 48, l. III, *De Anima,* of Hugh of St Victor.

[2] This is effective prayer (see *Degrees,* l. III, Pt. 3) which is indicated here by Richard of St Victor.

is raised above what human industry could effect, without, however, reaching the alienation of the spirit or ecstasy.

In the third kind of contemplation, which involves mental alienation, the mind loses all recollection of surrounding beings; they become as strangers, while it enters into a state which no human effort could procure (ch. ii).

188. In the contemplation produced by the dilatation of the mind, progress may be made in three ways. First, as in any art, by following the rules taught by the masters or discovered by oneself; second, by custom; third, by a great attention (ch. iii).

189. In contemplation with exaltation of the mind there are also three different degrees, human understanding, enlightened by divine light, being raised either above knowledge, or above the range of its powers, or even above nature. It is raised above knowledge when, thanks to the divine light communicated by God, it acquires ideas unknown until then about the divine greatness and majesty that knowledge cannot impart, because the idea of the divinity, once acquired scientifically, remains always the same, while to the contemplative the divinity appears more and more sublime (ch. iv).

The human understanding is raised above the reach of its own efforts when it is enlightened in such a way by God that it is raised by him to a supereminent science to which its own efforts could never have attained.

Finally, it is raised above nature when it arrives at such a degree that not only certain souls are unable to reach, but which completely exceeds the power of human nature; it is thus when favoured with the gift of prophecy or other similar gifts. To behold what has taken place in the past, or what will happen in the future, or to see in actual things that which is outside the range of the senses, to behold the hidden secrets of hearts, and to comprehend inscrutable mysteries—all this certainly transcends the powers of human nature (ch. iv).

190. There are three things that can lead the soul to alienation of mind, in which the mind loses sight of all things to occupy itself with God only. These are a great devotion, a great admiration, and a great cheerfulness. A great devotion, for, in the fervour of love, the soul melts like wax and rises like a light vapour to the highest regions; a great admiration, because the more crushed it feels when comparing its insignificance to the supreme beauty, so much the more exalted does it feel when experiencing the attraction to and desire for infinite blessings; a great cheerfulness, for the joy with which the soul

is inundated is sometimes so great that it is inebriated and rendered beside itself.

Such are the marvellous transports of loving souls, and if one has never experienced them it is a sign that one has not gained the summit of divine love[1] (ch. v).

4. *The Ladder of the Cloister* (Scala Claustralium).

191. This treatise was for a long time attributed to St Bernard, and, indeed, it would be no disparagement to the works of this great doctor. Learned men, however, do not consider it to be by him. The manuscript of the Carthusian monastery at Cologne attributes it to Dom Wigo, a Carthusian, possibly the fifth prior of the Grande-Chartreuse, who wrote other pious works. Suarez quotes this treatise as being by St Bernard, and valued it greatly,[2] and it seems opportune to reproduce here large extracts from this little work.[3]

(1) *The four degrees of spiritual exercises.*

192. "One day, when I was occupied with manual labour, I began to reflect on spiritual exercises, and then the four degrees of these exercises came before my mind—namely, reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. This is the ladder of the cloister which reaches from earth to heaven. The steps are few, but they are immense and full of grandeur. . . . Reading is a careful study of Holy Scripture with interior recollection. Meditation is an activity of the mind, seeking by the help of reason the knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is a turning of the heart towards God to ask him to protect us from evil and to bless us with his benefits. Contemplation is a raising of the soul towards God, tasting the joys of eternal sweetness."[4]

[1] This last sentence of Richard of St Victor must not be taken too literally, for St Francis de Sales, in his *Treatise on the Love of God*, very justly remarks that there are many saints in heaven who were never favoured with ecstasy or the transports of contemplation.

[2] Speaking of prayer and of its degrees, he thinks that it would suffice to copy out this sentence: *Quem hic transcribere consummata esset responsio* (*De oratione mentali*, ch. ii, No. 2).

[3] In the original the translation of this treatise is borrowed from the work published in Paris (Palmé) in 1870, as has been done already in the case of the works of St Bernard.

[4] The author of this treatise, as elsewhere the greater number of authors on spirituality, shows us that the soul attains to contemplation by reading and regular exercises. This does not mean that these exercises are *de rigueur*. St Paul the hermit, St Mary of Egypt in the desert, St Benedict in his cave at Subiaco, arrived at contemplation without the help of any book. How many ignorant people in the

(2) *A description of the functions of the four degrees* (ch. ii).

193. "Reading seeks the happiness of the life of the blessed; meditation discovers it; prayer asks for it; contemplation enjoys it. This is the meaning of these words of our Saviour—'Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.' Seek in reading and you will find in meditation; knock in prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation. Reading sets before you a substantial meal; meditation assimilates it; prayer relishes it; contemplation is the sweetness which makes it pleasant and strengthening. Reading is the skin, meditation the flesh, prayer the longing and expressed desire, contemplation the joy of satisfied desire. To render this more intelligible we will give one example among many others.

"By reading I know the words 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God' (Matt. v, 8). This is a short sentence, but how full of meaning and sweetness! For the soul it is a bunch of grapes to nourish it; the soul examines it and says: 'This seems good; I will enter into myself and try to understand it, and to find out this purity, for it is evidently desirable, since those who possess it are called blessed, and are promised the sight of God and eternal life; and how frequently it is praised in Holy Scripture!' Anxious to find an explanation of this text, the soul opens it out, puts it, as it were, in a press, then the reason is excited to find out the nature of this precious and enviable purity and by what means it can be obtained."

Then follow all the considerations that can be made on this text (ch. iii). Then, inflamed with desire for this purity of heart, the soul asks the Lord to grant it (ch. iv).

(3) *The work of contemplation* (ch. v).

194. "The contemplative, by his fiery prayer, becomes still more ardent in desire, shows his affection in this way, and invokes the Spouse; but the Lord, whose eye loves to rest on the just, and who not only lends an ear to his prayer, but does not even wait till it is finished, interrupts it and suddenly responds to his desires, appeases his

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course of the centuries—people who knew not how to read—have succeeded in rising to the high regions of mysticism! It is not any the less true that one ought when possible to have recourse to reading and to pious exercises, which are the usual means which facilitate the raising of the soul towards perfection, and those who omit them through negligence will not receive extraordinary helps from God to supply their place.

hunger, and, coming in a dew of heavenly sweetness, enlivens him, makes him forget earthly things, and strengthens him wonderfully with the thought of his presence. He inebriates him and at the same time gives him complete control over himself. And as in some carnal actions the soul is so enslaved by concupiscence that it loses the use of reason and man becomes entirely carnal, so in this sublime contemplation the senses present no opposition to the spirit, and carnal disturbance is so completely absorbed and suppressed by the soul that man becomes in a measure all spiritual."

(4) *Signs of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the soul* (ch. vi).

195. "But, O my God, how is your presence to be recognized, and by what sign can your arrival be known? Are sighs and tears the messengers and witnesses of this joy and consolation? If this be so, there is a strange sort of irony and discrepancy about it. Indeed, what connection can there be between consolations and sighs, between joy and tears, unless these terms are made use of to explain an abundant outpouring of an interior dew from heaven, and exterior ablution be a sign of an interior cleansing. 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted' (Matt. v, 4). . . . In these tears, O my soul, recognize thy Spouse and embrace thy Beloved. Be inebriated now with the torrent of delights, drink the milk and the honey from the breasts of consolation. These are the marvellous gifts and compensations kept in store for thee by thy Spouse in recompense for thy sighs and tears. This will be thy bread by day and by night, a bread to strengthen the heart of man, a bread sweeter than milk and honey. Lord Jesus, if the tears called forth by the thought of thee and the desire for thy presence are so sweet, with what joy will not thy full vision inundate the soul? If to weep for thee is so delightful, what will it be to be happy in thee? But why make known to the whole world these secret colloquies? Why attempt to translate into common parlance unspeakable and indescribable feelings? It is all a sealed book except to those who have experienced it; therefore it is in the book of experience that these secrets can be read, in the school of grace."

(5) *The eclipse of grace* (ch. vii).

196. "O my soul, how we have prolonged this discourse! It was so good to be here with Peter and John to contem-

plate the glories of the Spouse, to remain with him. If he had agreed to it we would have raised here, not two or three, tents, but only one to share his delightful companionship. But then the Spouse said to me: 'Leave me; the dawn is at hand. Thou hast already received the light of grace and the visit which was the object of thy desires.' And having given his blessing, dried up the sinew of the thigh, changed the name of Jacob to that of Israel (Gen. xxxii, 25, 31), the Spouse withdraws imperceptibly. After having been so long expected, he disappears in the twinkling of an eye. He hides himself and is seen no longer; no longer can the sweetness of contemplation be felt, yet he is there all the while to govern the soul."

(6) *This temporary withdrawal of grace is advantageous* (ch. viii).

197. "But have no fear, O spouse; do not despair nor think yourself despised if the Bridegroom hide his face for a moment. This trial will turn to your advantage, these comings and goings will be profitable to you. He comes and goes for your sake. He comes for your consolation, and withdraws out of prudence, that the greatness of the consolation may not make you proud. If he were to remain always with you you would despise others and would imagine that this grace belonged to you naturally instead of being a gift. This favour, however, is bestowed on whom and when God wills; it is not a heritage to which anyone has a right. It is a common saying that familiarity breeds contempt. The Bridegroom therefore withdraws in order that his continual presence may not bring him into contempt, and that his absence may make him more greatly desired, and that this desire may cause him to be sought, so that, thanks to this prolonged search, he may at last be found with the greater joy. Otherwise if this consolation were never lost—like that of the future state of glory, of which it is but an imperfect figure—we should believe, perhaps, that we had found here below a lasting city, and should seek with less anxiety that of the future. We must not, then, mistake this exile for our fatherland, nor this pledge for the sum which will be paid to us. The Spouse approaches and withdraws turn by turn, at times bringing consolation, and then overwhelming us with weakness and suffering. At one moment he allows us to taste how sweet he is, and then, before we have fully enjoyed his presence, he disappears."

(7) *How the soul should behave after the visit of divine grace* (ch. ix).

198. " But be careful, O spouse, if the Bridegroom absent himself. He does not go far away; and if you cannot see him he can see you. He is *full of eyes before and behind* (Apoc. iv, 6); you cannot escape from his sight. . . . He is a jealous Spouse: if you should lend an ear to another lover, if you should try to please others more than him, he will leave you at once for those who will love him better. He is noble, rich, and more beautiful than the sons of men, and his spouse should also be endowed with beauty. If he perceive in you a spot or wrinkle he will at once turn away his eyes, for he cannot endure any imperfection. Therefore, be chaste, be modest, be humble in order to merit the frequent visits of your Spouse."

(8) *Summary of the preceding* (ch. x).

199. " In order to condense what has already been explained at length, we will recapitulate. As it has been mentioned before, it is easy to see how the degrees indicated above are connected, and how they follow each other as much with respect to their cause as to their order. Reading comes first as a foundation and furnishes material for meditation. Meditation seeks diligently what is desirable and digs to find a treasure, but, being incapable of finding it, takes refuge in prayer. Prayer directed towards God with all its strength obtains the coveted treasure—the sweetness of contemplation—the possession of which is a recompense for the labour of the three preceding states, by inebriating the thirsty soul with the dews of a celestial sweetness. Reading, therefore, corresponds to exterior labour, meditation to interior knowledge, prayer to desire, and contemplation is above all feeling. The first degree is that of beginners, the second that of the more advanced, the third that of fervent souls, and the fourth is the state of souls truly happy."[1]

(9) *Reading is unprofitable without meditation, and meditation without prayer* (ch. xi).

200. " These degrees are so linked together, and sustain each other so well, that those which precede are of little

[1] The author reproduces here St Bernard's doctrine. Speaking of the lights of mystical prayer, the holy doctor said : " That which language cannot explain meditation must seek, prayer ask, good works merit, and purity obtain " (*De Consideratione*, v, 3).

or no use without those which follow. Of what use is it to give oneself up to continual reading if by meditation one does not draw out the sap? And even meditation can be fruitless unaccompanied by fervent prayer, the result of which will speedily be the sweetness of contemplation."

(10) *In what way the degrees already indicated are mutually linked together* (ch. xii).

201. "From this we may conclude that reading without meditation is useless, meditation without reading leads astray, meditation without prayer is fruitless, fervent prayer obtains contemplation. It is very rarely the case, and would be miraculous, if without prayer one had the gift of contemplation.

"Although this was the case with St Paul and some others, we ought not to tempt God by counting presumptuously on the gifts of the Most High; let us do what in us lies, let us read and meditate on the law of the Lord, let us beseech him to aid our weakness, to remember our imperfections. This is precisely the lesson that he himself gives us when he says: 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you' (Matt. vii, 7). 'The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent bear it away' (Matt. xi, 12).

"Happy the man whose heart, emptied of all other preoccupations, is set upon rising perseveringly through all these degrees, who, having sold all his goods, buys this field in which is hidden a precious treasure, a treasure which consists in seeing, in tasting how sweet is the Lord; who, practising the first degree, is prudent in the second, fervent in the third, raised above self in the fourth, and, ascending by these steps, goes from virtue to virtue until he beholds the God of Gods in Sion. Happy the man who can pause, if only for a minute, at this highest degree, and who can say with truth, 'I feel the grace of the Lord,' and with St Peter and St John can contemplate the glory of the Lord on the mountain, and with Jacob can often enjoy the embraces of Rachel. But after having been thus raised to heaven in contemplation, let him take care that he does not fall headlong into the abyss, nor come down from the vision of God to the corruption of the world and the seductions of the flesh. The soul of man is too weak to endure for any length of time the brightness of the true light, so that he should descend gently and imperceptibly to one of those degrees by which he ascended, and remain in one or other of them as he pleases, but always having

regard to times and places, being always so much the nearer to God as he is farther from the first of these degrees. But alas! how feeble and miserable is the condition of man! Thanks to the guidance of reason and to the testimony of Holy Scripture, we see clearly that in these four degrees is contained the perfection of a good life, and that he who wishes to lead a spiritual life should practise them. But who does so? Who? Find him, and we will praise him. Many wish to do so, but very few succeed; and God grant that we may be of these few."

(11) *The four obstacles to these four degrees* (ch. xiii).

202. "Four things usually keep us back from these four degrees. These are: Unavoidable necessity, the practice of honest work, human infirmity, and worldly vanity. The first is excusable, the second to be tolerated, the third is pitiable, the fourth sinful. . . .

"But it is time to finish this letter. Let us, then, beg the Lord to diminish at once for us the obstacles which prevent contemplation, and to make them entirely to disappear later. May he conduct us from virtue to virtue according to the degrees already pointed out, until we at last behold the God of Gods in Sion. There the elect receive the sweetness of divine contemplation, not drop by drop, nor at intervals, but in a torrent of delights, and are eternally inundated with a happiness and unchanging peace of which no one can deprive them."

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

1. *Blessed Albert the Great.*

203. THIS worthy master of St Thomas Aquinas, whom his contemporaries surnamed the admirable Doctor, was born in Suabia at the end of the twelfth century. He merits unquestionably to rank among the great masters of the spiritual life. He was a saint; that which he taught he learnt more by experience than by study. He was a theologian of the highest merit, and explained exactly and clearly the doctrine of mysticism in a way to throw great light on this subject.

204. Why, he asks, is this science called *mystical*, which means hidden?

It is because there are two ways of explaining the divine perfections: by negation, denying that the qualities we see in created beings are suitable to the divine nature; this way leaves the mind in uncertainty, because we put aside all that is certain, all that is known, and declare that we can explain nothing of the divine nature. The other way is by affirmation, it is positive theology; by it is disclosed all that was mysterious and hidden; in fine, we attribute to the First Cause, whose nature is unknown to us, all the qualities that we find in creatures; goodness, fatherhood, etc, Starting, therefore, from the unknown, the nature of which we desire to penetrate, we come to the known, whereas in the first case we start from known principles to arrive at the incomprehensible, at mystery; this is why this second science is called mystical science—that is to say, the science of mysteries, the secret, hidden science (*In libr. de Myst. theolog., quaestio prooëmialis*).

"To know God," he says further, "we cannot employ the same system which we make use of in natural science; we do not know him by evidence, like the first principles[1] and axioms. We do not know him in his cause, because he has none, being himself the First Cause; we do not know him even in his works, because he is infinitely greater than anything he has created; but the mind

[1] For example, there is no effect without a cause, the whole is greater than its part, etc.

receives a certain divine supernatural light, greatly superior to the ordinary ways of obtaining knowledge, and thus we are able to know him, but with a confused and indeterminate knowledge" (*ibid.*, ch. ii, *dub. circ.* i).

205. "Mystical science differs from other sciences in that it does not proceed from the data of the reason, but flows from a certain divine light. God himself enlightens and strengthens the intellect and attracts souls to desire at all costs to be united to him, but without always giving a clear and precise knowledge of the good to which he has made them aspire, for this good is only known in an indistinct manner" (*In libr. de Myst. th.; q. proöem., ad* 1).

Therefore it is in order to unite souls to himself that God communicates to them this high, mysterious knowledge.

"But," objects Albert, "the human mind unites much better with a known being than with one who is unknown, since union is effected by knowledge; how then, do you make out that the human understanding never unites so perfectly with God as when it acknowledges him to be unknown?" He answers: "To that which is unknown in itself our minds cannot unite, but to that which of itself is to be known, and which is only hidden from us, our minds can unite; because in being united to him we learn to know him more and more" (*In libr. M. th.*, cap. i, No. 6, *circ.* 11 *ad* 2).

206. This mystical science, then, is a grace and not the result of study, but is obtained by prayer.

"St Gregory makes the same remark very justly at the beginning of his *Moralia;* to understand divine things, prayer is more useful than study. Divine truth being above reason, we cannot, of ourselves, bring it within our grasp; it must diffuse itself in us; it is, according to St Augustine, an interior master. Nevertheless, teaching from without is not superfluous; it is like an instrument in the hands of the interior master who makes use of it to give his lessons" (*In libr. de Myst. th.*, cap. i, 1 B).

Another conclusion is drawn from what has been already said, it is, that we should not seek after tastes and feelings full of sweetness, nor yet after our own conceptions of God, but rise above them and adhere to God himself, whom we apprehend in an indistinct manner" (*ibid.*, 4, *ad* 6).

207. It remains, therefore, for us to see what Blessed Albert says about contemplation, that we may gain an exact idea of his doctrine.

"Contemplation is that true and perfect recollection of all the affections and powers of the soul, enabling them to realize with feelings of admiration and joy something of the divine nature; for example, its power, wisdom, goodness, and love; its secret judgements and its most holy will" (*Paradisus animae*, cap. xxxiii).

Contemplation must not be confounded with rapture; every divine contemplation is not a rapture; rapture is a higher degree of contemplation.

"*Objection.*—But when the highest part of the intellect is acting alone, and there is abstraction of the inferior powers, there is rapture; but does not this take place in all contemplation of God?

"*Reply.*—During rapture or ecstasy the inferior powers are excluded, being of no use in any way; but in contemplation these powers are not excluded, but made use of; but this use of the sensible powers is diminished, their action is unnoticed and scarcely perceptible" (*In libr. de Myst. th.*, cap i).

208. It is in order to draw the soul as far as possible away from these inferior powers, imagination, sensibility, etc., that mystical writers counsel the forsaking of self to be cast into God. It is in this way that Albert the Great understands it. He wishes us to know how to repulse all images and everything that comes through the senses (*Parad. an.*, cap. xxxiii, *De contemplatione*). As to going out of oneself, *excedere seipsam*, that is effected by thinking of and loving only God.

"*Objection.*—No creature can go out of itself; the counsel is impossible to follow which is given by St Dionysius, 'Raise yourself up to God by going out of yourself.'

"*Reply.*—We cannot go out of ourselves as to the substance, but we can by our faculties, and this is the counsel here given by St Dionysius. By our faculties we can rise above ourselves, and this is what occurs when we are taken up to God, who is above us" (*In libr. de Myst. th.*, cap. i, 4).

209. "Of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, four are for the active life: piety, fortitude, knowledge, and counsel; and three for the contemplative life: the fear of God, which inspires respect for his majesty; understanding which enables us to grasp the truth, and wisdom which makes us enjoy his goodness (*Compend. theolog. verit.*, attributed by some to *Ulrich of Strasburg*, cap. xxxviii).

"By the spiritual senses our souls perceive the spiritual charms of the Spouse; they enjoy his sweetness and the

perfume of his presence. . . . By this it follows that the spiritual senses are nothing else but certain conceptions of the spirit, certain ideas formed by the mind about the truths that are the subjects of contemplation" (*Comp. theolog. verit.*, cap. lvi; *alias* l. V, ch. xxxviii).

210. "That which should make us desire contemplation is that we experience therein an ineffable peace, and acquire an admirable perfection, and that we find in it the principle of perfect happiness. For we learn through it to know God, the source of all beatitude, and knowing him we love him, loving him we desire him, and desiring him we seek after him and find him, and having found him, we possess him with an extreme happiness.

"As St Bernard says, He who aspires to enter into himself, to seek always in his inmost depths the presence of God, regards being obliged to tear himself away from the consolations of this holy search, by the seductions, or rather by the tribulations of the flesh, as the very torment of hell.

"It is a sign of true contemplation if one feel the weariness of living, and sigh like Tobias: It would be better for me to die than to live; or breathe out this lamentation of Job, Life is burdensome to my soul, or that of St Paul, Unhappy man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death? Does not he who thirsts after the source of life say, 'As the hart pants after the fountain of living water, so does my soul pant after thee, O God!'?

"St Gregory well defines the contemplative life when he says, 'The contemplative life consists in loving God and one's neighbour with one's whole heart, in resting from outward activities to adhere to God, the sole object to be desired, in driving away every care in order to aspire to the contemplation of the face of the Creator; then it is that the weight of this corruptible life becomes heavy and very painful, and one looks forward with longing desire to the day on which one will take part in the angelic melodies, and mix with the inhabitants of the heavenly city, where with God we shall enjoy an eternal and incorruptible life'"[1] (*Parad. anim.*, cap. xxxiii).

[1] We have already heard many of the masters (42, 123, 293) telling us that the desire for heaven is one of the marks of true contemplation. Indeed, heaven means God known, loved, and possessed. Now, contemplatives having much higher ideas of God, and feeling a much more lively attraction for him than ordinary pious souls, have a much greater appreciation of heaven and a very much more ardent desire for it. Others know by reflection that to see God and to enjoy him will be an intense happiness for them; but contemplatives have no need of reflec-

211. But it is especially in his admirable treatise on union with God (*De adhærendo Deo*) that the holy theologian sets forth his doctrine.

He begins in a touching manner: "It has occurred to me at the end of my career to write a treatise on the most complete detachment to which one can be raised in this life, and of the pure, peaceful, and strong union of the soul thus detached, with God alone."

We should like to quote entire chapters of this little treatise, but it is so easy to procure that we prefer to recommend it to the reader.[1]

It contains the simple and traditional doctrine on contemplation and union with God, on perfection, which consists precisely in this contemplation and this intimate union obtained by casting aside preoccupations and distracting recollections, and by freedom from sensible representations. Blessed Albert exhorts those souls who are aiming at perfection never to tire, never to rest until they have received the earnest of future plenitude. When it is a question of union and intimacy with God no rest can be taken, nor any giving way to fatigue allowed until the object of desire has been attained[2] (ch. vii).

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tion to bring this truth to mind. To unite themselves perfectly to God, to possess him fully, to love him quite freely, this is the constant aim of their aspirations; they feel, withal, nothing but indifference and disgust for all that is earthly and transitory, and how, therefore, could they do aught else but sigh after heaven? (*cf.* Tauler, *traduction Noël* t. v, p. 187).

[1] Two French translations of this treatise have been published: one by Fr. Rousset, O.P., in a book entitled *La Doctrine des Saints*, Paris, Lethielleux; the other by Fr. Berthier, of the same order, *De l'union avec Dieu* (*libraire de l'œuvre de S Paul*). This last must allow of some reservation. In a note to ch. i the spirituality of the thirteenth century is opposed to that of the sixteenth. "In the thirteenth century," he says, "it was necessary to dispense with the phantoms of the imagination, in the sixteenth they were multiplied and even shown in strong imagery." This opposition does not exist, for the very simple reason that these contradictory rules concern different persons. The advice of St Ignatius, on "the composition of place," is evidently addressed to souls who required familiarizing with the practice of prayer; while the recommendation of other great masters to renounce sensible representations is for those souls whom they no longer suit. It was precisely in the sixteenth century that this distinction was made by St Teresa, and even more explicitly by St John of the Cross—An English translation of the treatise has been published: *On Union with God*, which contains Fr. Berthier's notes (London, Burns Oates and Washbourne).

[2] Some critics doubt whether this treatise be really the work of Blessed Albert the Great. If it were, as some think, a work of the fourteenth century, it would still remain a valuable witness to the mystical doctrine of the Middle Ages.

2. *St Thomàs Aquinas.*

212. We have now arrived at the Angel of the Schools, at the Prince of theologians, St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

He looks upon those as being perfect who have forsaken all that could impede the flight of the soul towards God (II-II, q. 184, a. 2). Thus, according to him, the principal care of the perfect is *to become united to God, and to be happy in him. Tertium studium est ut homo ad hoc principaliter intendat ut* Deo inhereat et eo fruatur, *et hoc pertinet ad perfectos.* The first thing necessary is to keep far from sin, and this is the work of beginners; then to make for the goal, which is God, and this is done by those who are advancing; and finally to rest in God, *tertium est* quies in termino, and this is the work of the perfect (II-II, q. 24, a. 9, c.).

This is why this great doctor considers the contemplative life as the characteristic of perfect love, and it must be said of him as of the masters he loves to quote, Dionysius, St Gregory, Richard of St Victor, that in order to understand his doctrine on perfection it is necessary to study his teaching on contemplation.

213. We are, therefore, about to present here the different points of doctrine to be found in the *Summa.*[1]

All the degrees of charity do not include the contemplative life; it is the characteristic of perfect love. This does not apply to the active life, which precedes that of the contemplative, for the common way has to be followed before arriving at *that which belongs to the perfect*[2] (II-II, q. 182, a. 3, *ad* 1).

Nevertheless, if the active life precede and be a preparation for the contemplative life, one can return from the latter to the former—for one learns in contemplation how to direct one's actions—and also from the former to the latter.

Doubtless, as St Gregory recognizes, there are minds so restless, so impulsive, that they are only suitable for an active life, while others are so calm that only the contemplative life is appropriate to them. "However," adds

[1] In the second edition of *L'Etat Mystique* we have quoted other texts of the holy doctor relating to this question, and have taken them in particular from his *Commentary on the Book of the Sentences.*

[2] *Vita contemplativa non ordinatur ad qualemcumque charitatem Deo, sed ad perfectam . . . ex quo etiam patet quod vita activa praecedit contemplativam, sicut id quod est commune omnium praecedit in via generationis id quod est proprium perfectorum.*

the holy Pontiff, "it often happens that love makes those who are most fond of repose, active, and that those who are the most impetuous are soothed and calmed by a lively feeling of humble fear in contemplation." Also, those who have the greatest aptitude for the active life may, by it, prepare themselves for contemplation, while those who are most suited for the contemplative life will, by giving themselves up to active works, become better disposed for contemplation (II-II, q. 182, a. 4).

In fine, the soul filled with the grace of contemplation is disposed, by this same grace and by the light and love drawn from contemplation, to produce certain works of the active life, such, for example, as teaching and preaching; *est opus vitae activae quod ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur, sicut doctrina et praedicatio* (II-II, q. 188, a. 6).

St Thomas desires, also with St Gregory, whom he quotes on this subject, that prelates and those who are in high places should not only give themselves up to active work, but should also excel in the life of contemplation (II-II, q. 182, a. 1, *ad* 1).

214. The gift of understanding corresponds to the sixth Beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

"There are two things," he said (I-II, q. 69, a. 2) that make us hope for future happiness: First, a disposition of the soul, which makes us capable of acquiring it by the way of merit; second, a happiness begun yet incomplete, portent of a felicity to come; this happiness is found in this world in the perfect for whom it is already the first reward of virtue.

Now, both may be found in the sixth Beatitude as, indeed, in all the others; this interior disposition which prepares us for the vision of God is a purity of the heart detached from all ill-regulated affection, and this purity can be obtained by the practice of virtue, and by those gifts of the Holy Spirit which guide the will to that which is good. Another kind of purity of heart which perfects the first and succeeds in preparing the soul for the vision of God is that purity which prevents one judging by visible representations, or by the false opinions of heretics, the attributes of God; this purity proceeds from the gift of understanding.

As to the beatitude promised as a recompense, it consists of the vision of God. Now there are two visions of God, the perfect vision wherewith God is seen in his essence, which is the vision of the elect in heaven, and the imperfect vision which is also a recom-

pense, and a presage of the future vision; in this God is seen, not as he is, but as he is not, for in this life we have a more or less perfect knowledge of God according as we understand more or less perfectly how much he surpasses all that can be conceived of him. These two kinds of vision are due to the gift of understanding (II-II, q. 8, a. 7).

Above all, it is to the gift of wisdom that St Thomas attributes the act of contemplation. "It truly appears," he says, "that to contemplate divine things proceeds from the gift of wisdom" (III *Dist.*, xxxv, q. II, a. 1, sol. 3a). The contemplation of divine things belongs to the gift of wisdom (II-II, q. 45, a. 3, *ad* 3; *cf.* I, q. 64, a. 1).

This gift of wisdom is found in every soul in the state of grace. "Wisdom enables us to judge rightly of divine things, either in considering them, or in deriving from them direction for the conduct of life. Souls united to God obtain by that union the gift of wisdom, but in different ways; some obtain it for that which is necessary for their salvation, whether it be for action or contemplation; this gift of wisdom is for whoever is in a state of grace. There are those who are favoured with this gift for the enlightenment of *others*, either about the mysteries of faith, or about the way they should follow in their actions. This second effect of the gift of wisdom would belong, rather, to gratuitous graces," since it is given for the good of others (II-II, q. 45, a. 5, c.).

215. The moral virtues belong to the contemplative life, in so far as they prepare the soul for it; they remove obstacles, such as the excitement of the passions, and distractions produced by earthly cares, and they also confer peace and purity on the soul.

Taken by itself, contemplation is nothing else than the consideration of the truth; but to consider this truth it must be possessed, and consequently acquired; and this is effected by reading, hearing sermons, meditation, and prayer to obtain the necessary light from God. These different acts, moreover, are part of the contemplative life as a preparation (II-II, q. 180, a. 2 and 3).

216. True contemplation is the contemplation of God and of divine things; it is doubtless imperfect, because God can only be seen as in a mirror, and imperfectly, but nevertheless it is the beginning of beatitude, which will only become perfect in heaven. If, however, true contemplation is the contemplation of God, then the consideration of the works of God, his creatures, will serve as a ladder to mount to divine contemplation, and in this manner did Richard of St Victor understand it (*ibid.*).

217. The purely contemplative act cannot last long, but the different preparatory acts may be lengthy, and by them contemplation may be prolonged (II-II, q. 180, a. 8).

Contemplation is an act of the mind, but the heart has a large share in it, because it is produced by love and the joy it occasions proceeds from satisfied love. St Gregory, therefore, proves the contemplative life to consist in the love of God, for when the soul is inflamed with this love it aspires to the contemplation of the divine beauty, and the joy which results is the outcome of that fervent love which has attained to the desired object (II-II, q. 180, a. 1).

Contemplation causes a lively delectation in the soul because it is an agreeable work of the mind ever thirsting after truth, and because the heart, in love with God, finds in beholding him the greatest happiness (II-II, q. 180, a. 7).

It is also the proof of an ardent love; it is proper to a soul inflamed with love to leave all things in the present life and to give itself to contemplation (II-II, q. 182, a. 2).

217 a. The doctrine of St Thomas on contemplation cannot be better set forth than by one of his most illustrious disciples, Fr. Schwalm († 1908).

"St Thomas Aquinas," he says, "never classed contemplation among the extraordinary graces. To work miracles, to prophesy, to discern the spirit of God or the evil spirit in souls, to speak in strange tongues or understand them, to cure the sick without natural means, to discourse with a striking faith, science, and wisdom on the things of God, to behold him when beside ourselves or in rapture; these are the graces pronounced by the angelic doctor to be out of the ordinary way. These graces do not indicate the upward stages of the progress of the just and the perfect, nor even the highest stage, but simply serve to illustrate the dealings of God with his messenger, and to commend him personally, his mission and work in the Church. They are graces to help him in his work for the public good; miraculous signs of a great purpose of God. Contemplation, on the contrary, is concerned with the normal development of virtue and Christian perfection—except in the case just now cited, of ecstatic rapture. Contemplation, in the *Summa* of St Thomas, has a position beside the active life as a kind of vocation, a state of life of a Christian. It is not the universal state of all souls in the grace of God, but is the summit to which the practise of moral virtues leads; it is the peaceful possession of the truth which has been discovered and assimilated bit by bit in meditation; it is the effect of

divine love triumphing over all lesser affections, and of a higher life and greater progress in virtue; it is the prayer of those who are advancing and of the perfect.

"These are the views developed by St Thomas in his special treatise on the contemplative life.[1] They seem to decide the question as to whether contemplation is an extraordinary state."

218. Fr. Schwalm makes the remark that St Thomas places raptures among graces *gratis datae* (II-II, q. 175).

In rapture he distinguishes two features: the alienation of the senses, which can take place without miracle, and the irresistible action of God violently transporting the soul. Rapture is a deeper state than ecstasy. Ecstasy, in the main, only indicates a loss of perception, a going out of self, a ceasing to be in an ordinary and usual state. This is why St Dionysius says that it is the nature of love to produce ecstasy; the loving impulse carries souls towards the object of their affection, and makes them lose all self-control, and this takes place by the sole power of love without any exterior violence (*cf.* I-II, q. 28, a. 3). In rapture, on the contrary, it is God who acts, and, drawing the soul to himself, deprives it of the use of the senses.

St Bonaventure uses the word "ecstasy" in the same sense (*De 7 grad. cont.*). "There is ecstasy," he says, "when, forsaking the exterior man (meaning oblivious of the body and senses), and rushing forward with all the power that humility and purity impart, we rise above self and, full of joy, approach the entirely spiritual source of divine love. By humility we forsake the exterior man (we strip ourselves of self); by purity the interior man is raised to the source of light, and there he receives the pure exhalations of divine love, thanks to which he forgets all that he has forsaken and only aspires to the happiness of his eternal home. Divine love produces this ecstasy in those who possess it, and have no room in their hearts for self-love. If we had a real love instead of a mere semblance of it, we, too, should be in this holy ecstasy."

3. *St Bonaventure. The Journey of the Soul towards God.*

219. We have just quoted St Bonaventure (1221-1274), and it is time to show the doctrine of this great doctor. The most celebrated of his works is the *Journey of the Soul towards God* (*Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*). Gerson

[1] II-II, q. 179-182; *cf.* q. 171 *ff*, and I-II, q. 3, a. 1 and 4.

called this treatise an immense work (*opus immensum*). In a small space, it contains a rich and substantial doctrine.

The aim of the seraphic doctor is to point out the way to peace and perfect love. Now, it is by a true knowledge of God that these are obtained, and this knowledge, begun by study and meditation, is perfected and completed in the spiritual transports of contemplation (*excessus mentales*).

We will sum up this treatise, and notice the analogy between this doctrine and that of Richard of St Victor.

(1) *Prologue.*

220. After an invocation of God, the Blessed Virgin and St Francis, St Bonaventure expresses himself thus:[1]

"It happened by the divine will that in the thirty-third year after the death of our Blessed Father, I retired to Mount Alverna, as to a place of rest, with the desire of finding peace of mind.

"There, while raising my soul to God, by the help of pious considerations, I recalled to mind amongst other things the miraculous vision that the Blessed Francis had had in this same place; I mean the vision of a crucified Seraph with wings. It seemed to me, then, that this resembled our Blessed Father in his loving contemplation, and showed the path to take to arrive at this contemplation."

221. The holy doctor, before pointing out this path, so necessary to know, recalls that only those who have derived an ardent love of God at the foot of the cross can expect to advance in it. If this love be wanting the considerations he offers the reader will be powerless to lead to contemplation.

"By the six wings of the Seraphim can be understood the six degrees of enlightenment through which the soul passes successively and prepares, by means of fervour and loving transports, to attain true peace; but progress can only be made in this path by means of a very ardent love for Jesus crucified; for, in order to be disposed for the divine contemplation which leads to mental ecstasy, it is necessary to be, like Daniel, a man of desires; now there are two things that stimulate our desires; these are fervent prayer drawing forth heartfelt sighs and groans, and those enlightening considerations to which is due the attention of the soul directed towards the source of divine light.

[1] *L'Itinéraire de l'âme à Dieu* has been published and translated by Fr. Charles, O.F.M., Vanves, *Imprimerie Franciscaine*, 1900.

"This is why I first invite the reader to pour forth prayers and sighs to Jesus crucified, whose precious Blood washes away the stains of sin. Do not imagine that reading without grace will be efficacious, or meditation without devotion, or research without admiration, or attention without transports of joy, or talent without piety, knowledge without charity, understanding without humility, or study without divine grace. Therefore, it is to the humble, prepared by divine grace, that I propound these considerations; to contrite and pious souls filled with the unction of celestial joy, in love with divine wisdom, and fired with the desire to glorify, love, and enjoy God."

(2) *Of the degrees of this rising to God, and of the consideration of God through the traces of his creative action left in the universe* (ch. 1).

222. The saintly doctor lays stress on this first point of mystical doctrine, that constant prayer is necessary in order to obtain the gift of contemplation.

"*Blessed is the man whose help is from thee; in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set* (Ps. lxxxiii). As happiness is nothing else than the enjoyment of the sovereign Good, and as the sovereign Good is out of our reach, no one can be happy unless he rises above himself, not in body, but in spirit. Nevertheless, no one can rise above himself without help from on high; whatever may be the steps we have disposed in our hearts to take, we can do nothing without divine help. This help is given freely to those who ask it humbly and piously from the bottom of their hearts—that is to say, who sigh for it from this vale of tears, and this is done in fervent prayer. Prayer, therefore, is the first step by which we ascend to God. This is why Dionysius, in his book on *Mystical Theology*, wishing to prepare us for higher mental states, begins by prayer. Thanks to prayer, the light from on high shows the steps by which we may ascend to the knowledge of God."

223. St Bonaventure now points out by what graduated and progressive considerations we can ascend to this knowledge, but, in the first place, he enumerates the different modes of perception, the separate faculties given us by God, and afterwards he points out the use we should make of them. These faculties or powers of the soul, having been turned aside from their purpose

and vitiated by sin, he shows how they can be reformed and brought back to their right use.

Given our nature, which cannot behold God as he is, we must make use of created things as a ladder by which we can mount to him. Now, the way that leads to God can be divided into three stages: the first is by corporeal substances, the second by spiritual substances, and then we arrive at the divine substance.

There are in our souls three distinct powers; one puts us in touch with the objects of the senses, another enables us to consider and to know ourselves, the third raises us above ourselves.

As each of these powers can be subdivided into two, we must count "the degrees of the powers of the soul as six, by which, beginning at the lowest things, we raise ourselves to the highest, from exterior to interior things, from temporal to eternal things; thus there are the senses and the imagination, the reasoning faculty and the inferior intelligence, the superior intelligence and the apex of the soul."[1] These faculties formed in us by nature, deformed by sin, reformed by grace, should be purified by justice, proved by knowledge, perfected by wisdom.

224. "According to the first design of nature, man had been created with a facility for the repose of contemplation, and that is why he was placed in a delightful garden. Having, however, turned his back on the true light and desired perishable goods, he was, by his own fault, with all his posterity, under the yoke of original sin, which doubly corrupted human nature, infecting the understanding with ignorance, and the flesh with concupiscence. Also now, having become bent to the earth, blind, and seated in darkness, he does not see the light from heaven unless grace and justice help him against concupiscence, and knowledge and wisdom against ignorance; and this is brought about by Jesus Christ, *who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption* (1 Cor. i, 30).

"Jesus Christ, therefore, who is the power and the wisdom of God, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, being full of grace and truth, communicates to us this grace and this truth; the grace he gives is the grace of charity. . . . As to the knowledge of truth, he has taught it according to the threefold mode of symbolic, exact and

[1] *Apex mentis seu synderesis scintilla.* Gerson calls *synderesis* not the highest part of the understanding, but that part which corresponds to the appetitive faculty, the apex of the will (*vide* below, No. 271).

mystical theology, so that by symbolic theology we may make a good use of sensible ideas, by exact theology of intelligible truths, and by mystical theology we may be raised to supermental states of rapture.

"Therefore, whoever desires to raise himself to God, after avoiding sin which deforms nature, should exercise the faculties of the soul and prepare them by prayer for the grace which reforms; by holy conduct for the justice which purifies; by meditation for the knowledge which enlightens; and by contemplation for the wisdom which renders perfect. Thus, as no one can attain wisdom except by the aid of grace, justice, and knowledge, so none can arrive at contemplation except by profound meditation, holy conduct, and fervent prayer. So that as it is by grace that the will is made right and the reason is enlightened, we should first of all pray, then live holily, and finally apply ourselves to the consideration of the truth, and in this way mount gradually until at last we have arrived in the presence of God on the high mountain of Sion.

225. "Since, however, one has to ascend this Jacob's ladder before one can come down, let us note down the lowest step of the ladder; let us see all the visible world as though in a mirror, and by this we shall come to God, the supreme Creator. . . . Wisdom beckons us on, and cries, 'Come over to me all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits' (Ecclus. xxiv, 26). 'For by the greatness and the beauty of the creature, the creator of them may be seen' (Wisd. xiii, 5). His power, his wisdom, and his infinite goodness shine forth in his creation."

Here follow some beautiful thoughts on the order and variety of the visible works of God; and then the holy doctor concludes:

"Open your eyes, then, lend an ear, loosen your tongue, apply your heart, so as to see, to hear, to praise, love, adore, and glorify God in all his creatures, if you do not wish the entire universe to rise against you, for 'the whole world shall fight with him against the unwise' (Wisd. v, 21). And it will be a subject of glory for him who can say with the prophet: 'For thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in thy doings' (Ps. xci, 5). 'How great are thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom; the earth is filled with thy riches'" (Ps. ciii, 24).

(3) *God manifests himself in the traces which his creative action has left in the visible world* (ch. ii).

226. The workman is known by his work.

This is why an idea of God can be formed by considering his creatures; but ordinary workmen live apart from their works; the divine worker, on the contrary, never leaves them; he is and dwells in them, or rather, they live in him. He thus communicates to them somewhat of his own infinite perfections; and in studying them one may find in their properties images and similitudes of his own attributes. The seraphic doctor shows how images of the perfections of God can be discerned here on earth; an image of his divine paternity, of the generation of the Word, of that infinite happiness to be found only in God, and of the supreme and infallible truth.

"Every creature in this visible world," he says, "leads the minds of the wise and the contemplative towards God, for creatures are like the shadows, echoes, and images of him, who is the First Cause, the Almighty, the all Wise, the all Good, the eternal source, the light, the fulness, the author, the example, and the ruler of all things; they are his footprints, the similitudes, and signs presented to our eyes that in them we should see God."

(4) *God beheld in his image, which is the soul endowed with its natural faculties* (ch. iii).

227 "The two preceding degrees, in conducting us to God by the unmistakable traces left by his creative action in the visible world, having led us to enter into ourselves we behold our souls shining with the brightness of the divine likeness. This is our third step. Let us, then, leave the court of the temple, and, entering the holy place—that is to say, the part that is in front of the tabernacle (Exod. xxvi, 34), let us endeavour to see God there as in a mirror; there the light of truth will shine, like that of the candle in the *golden candlestick*, on the face of our soul and show forth the image of the holy Trinity. . . ."

Then follow learned thoughts on the faculties of the soul and their bearing on the divine mysteries. The saintly author shows how it is possible by this study of the soul to rise to the idea of the three divine Persons and their mutual relationship.

(5) *God beheld in a soul in the state of grace the true image of God* (ch. iv).

228. "Not only can we arrive at the contemplation of the First Cause by making use of self-knowledge, but we can also contemplate him within us; and this method, being higher than the preceding one, is the fourth degree of contemplation.

"How comes it, then, that so few people understand that they must enter into themselves to contemplate God? It is because the soul, distracted by a thousand uneasy cares, does not enter into itself by the memory; blinded by outward appearances, it does not recollect itself by the help of the understanding: allured by concupiscence, it no longer feels any wish for interior sweetness and spiritual joy, and this is why, absorbed in earthly things, it cannot enter into itself to find there the image of God. . . .

"However enlightened by nature and acquired knowledge we may be, we cannot enter into ourselves to find delight in the Lord except by the agency of Christ, who said: 'I am the door. By me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and he shall go in and go out and shall find pastures' (John x, 9). Nevertheless, we cannot pass through this door unless we entertain for him sentiments of faith, hope, and charity.

"Our souls, therefore, being the image of God, ought to be endowed with the three theological virtues, by which they may be purified, illuminated, and perfected. . . . They ought to endeavour to reproduce in themselves the virtues of faith, hope, and of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father, the Word incarnate, uncreated, inspired, and, as such, the way, the truth, and the life. While by faith we believe in Jesus Christ, the uncreated Word and splendour of the Father, we recover hearing and sight; hearing to hear the words of Christ, sight to contemplate the splendours of his glory. By hope we sigh for the inspired Word, and by dint of desiring and loving we receive a sense of spiritual fragrance, while by charity we embrace the incarnate Word, who fills us with delight. We enter into him by the force of our love, and thus we recover taste and touch. Having in this way recovered all the senses, our souls see, hear, breathe, taste, and embrace their divine Bridegroom, we can then sing, like the spouse, the Canticle of Canticles, which was written for the exercise of contemplation, in accordance with this fourth degree.

"For it is when arrived at this degree of contemplation,

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after having recovered the interior senses for the purpose of being able to see the sovereign beauty, to hear the ineffable harmony, to inhale the divine fragrance, to taste the supreme sweetness, and to touch the superlatively delightful that we are ready for those transports of love, *excessus mentales*, that are the consequence of devotion, admiration, and joy."[1]

(6) *On the consideration of the divine Unity by its principal name, which is Being* (ch. v).

229 "God manifests himself to us in three ways: outside us, within us, and above us; outside us by his *traces*,[2] within us by his likeness, and above us by divine light. . . . Those who are practised in the first mode have entered into the vestibule of the tabernacle; those who have practised the second have entered the holy place; but those who have exercised themselves in the third enter with the High Priest into the Holy of Holies, where the two Cherubim of glory (Exod. xxv) above the Ark cover the propitiatory with their wings. The two Cherubim are a figure of the two modes, the two degrees in which the eternal attributes of God can be contemplated: the first degree relates to the attributes of the divine essence, and the second to the properties of the three divine Persons.

"In the first mode the soul considers *Being* himself, and says that the first name of God is, 'He who is.' In the second mode the soul fastens its gaze on the Good in himself, saying: 'The first name of God is He who is good.'

"The first of these names relates especially to the Old Testament, which proclaims particularly the unity of the divine essence, for it was said to Moses, 'I am who am' (Exod. iii, 14). The second name belongs to the New Testament, which determines the plurality of Persons by administering Baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This is why Christ, our Master, desiring to raise a young man who had kept the commandments to the state of evangelical perfection, attributes the title 'Good' exclusively to God; 'None is good,' said he, 'but one, that is God' (Mark x).

[1] In the *Breviloquium* (Pars V, c. 6) the holy doctor likewise understands the spiritual senses as lights given to the soul concerning the truth which it is to contemplate, as spiritual sweetnesses which rejoice and strengthen it: *Sensus spirituales . . . non dicunt novos habitus, sed status delectationum et usus spiritualium speculationum, quibus replentur et consolantur spiritus virorum istorum . . . Sensus spirituales dicunt perceptiones mentales, circa veritatem contemplandam.*

[2] The sensible world. (See above, No. 226).

John Damascene, after Moses, said, 'He who is,' this is the first name of God; and Dionysius, after Christ, said, 'He who is good,' this is the first name of God."

Then follow deep considerations on the divine Being, who is necessary, the beginning, and the last end of all things, who is eternal, omnipresent, etc.

The sovereignly pure and absolute Being, who is simple Being, is the first and the last, and consequently the origin and end of all things. As he is eternal and everywhere present, in him are all times; he is at once, therefore, the centre and the circumference. As he is infinitely simple and infinitely great, he is wholly in all things, and outside all things; he is the sphere of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.[1] As he is infinitely present and immutable, he remains always at rest, giving to all things their movement.

"As he is infinitely perfect and immense, he is in all things without being enclosed, outside all things without being excluded, above all things without being raised, beneath all things without being lowered. As he is sovereignly one and sovereignly all, he is all in all things, however numerous they may be, and although he is one, because in him is all virtue, every exemplary form, all power of communicating himself; therefore, all is from him, by him, and in him, for he is almighty, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness. To see him as he is, is to possess supreme happiness, according to what was said to Moses, 'I will show thee all good' (Exod. xxxiii)."

(7) *On the contemplation of the ever blessed Trinity* (ch. vi).

230. "After having considered the unity of the divine Essence, the eye of the understanding should be raised to the contemplation of the ever blessed Trinity; therefore the second cherub is placed near the first (Exod. xxv, 19).

"In the same way as pure Being is the fundamental principle of all the essential attributes, and the name which makes them known to us, so the sovereign Good is the fundamental principle on which rests the doctrine of the divine emanations. Good tends to communicate itself: *Bonum est sui diffusivum* . . . and it is because he is infinitely good that the divine Being communicates himself infinitely. . . . Also in the sovereign Good there is

[1] This celebrated saying, often repeated by authors, is by Alain de Lille († about 1202), monk of Citeaux, "the most spiritual and learned writer of his time," says Hurter.

eternally an actual and consubstantial production, the eternal principle producing eternally his equal, by way of generation and spiration.

"So, in the idea of the sovereign Good, can be seen the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity; from the supreme goodness flows the sovereign communication, the sovereign communication requires a sovereign consubstantiality, the sovereign consubstantiality entails a perfect resemblance, and consequently a perfect equality, as well as a sovereign co-eternity. From all this results the absolute co-intimacy by virtue of which one Person is necessarily in the other by circumincession, and they operate in union by the one substance, the one virtue, the common operation of the Blessed Trinity."

There follow some lofty considerations on this great dogma of the holy Trinity, and on that of the Incarnation, after which the holy doctor concludes: "This consideration completes the illumination of the soul. . . . After the sixth degree it has but to wait for the day of rest, in which, giving itself up entirely to ecstatic contemplation, it rests from its search and its labours."

(8) *On mental and mysterious rapture, wherein, rest being given to the understanding, the affection is entirely centred in God* (ch. vii).

231. We have now gone through the six considerations which are akin to the six steps leading up to the throne of the true Solomon, and which are also like the six wings of the Seraphim, by which the soul of the true contemplative, full of the brightness of divine wisdom, can raise itself to God; they can also be compared to the first six days in which the soul must labour before arriving at the Sabbath, the true repose of the spirit. Our soul has considered God, outside itself, in the works of creation which are like divine footprints; within itself, as it is the image of God; above itself, thanks to the light which shines upon us; and in the light itself, as far as this is possible in the condition of our mortal life and the weakness of our understanding. Arrived at the sixth degree, there are in him who is the first and supreme Principle, the mediator of God and men, Jesus Christ, ineffable mysteries to be considered, to which nothing comparable can be found in creatures, and which are beyond the power of the human understanding.

"There is nothing more to be done now but to rise by a sublime transition, not only above the world of

sense, but above self. Now, in this sublime transition, Christ is the way, he is the door, he is the holy ladder, and the vehicle; he resembles the propitiatory above the holy Ark, the secret hidden to former ages. Now, he who has his face turned towards the propitiatory (like the two cherubim), he who contemplates with faith, hope, and charity, with devotion, admiration, praise, adoration, joy, and rapture, Jesus crucified, makes with him the Passover—that is to say, the transit: he passes through the Red Sea, thanks to the staff of the Cross; he leaves the land of Egypt to traverse the desert and to taste the hidden manna. With Jesus Christ, he rests in the tomb, for he is as though dead to all outward things, yet nevertheless, feels, as far as is possible here, that happiness which was promised to the good thief who remained united to Jesus Christ, 'This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.'

"This also happened to St Francis when on the high mountain, where I once thought of this little book that I am writing; he saw a seraph with six wings, stretched on a cross, as we learnt from the companion who was then with him. There he became united to God in the ecstasy of contemplation, and became the model of perfect contemplation, as formerly he had been the model of the active life. God changed this new Jacob into Israel to invite all souls truly spiritual to this transition more by example than by word, to this admirable transport of divine love."

232. "Now, in this passing over, if it is to be complete, all intellectual operations must be tranquillized and our hearts' whole affection must be carried over and given to God. But this gift is mystical and entirely secret; no one knows it except he who receives it; none receives it but he who desires it; none can desire it but only he who is inflamed to the core of his heart by the fire of the Holy Spirit, that fire sent by Christ upon the earth. This is why the Apostle says that this hidden wisdom has been revealed by the Holy Ghost. As nature can do nothing towards acquiring this wisdom, and human effort very little, less attention must be given to the seeking after this grace than to the possession of it, less to the language and more to the interior joy, less must be given to words and books, and all to the gift of God—that is to say, to the Holy Spirit; little attention, or rather none, to the creature, and all to the Creator, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Here the holy doctor returns to his idea in quoting the celebrated text from St Dionysius that we have already

cited (No. 65), where the faithful soul is invited to renounce all the operations of the understanding to be lost in God and united to him with an ineffable union of love; with him, who is above all *essence* and all understanding.

232 *a*. In his book, *The Fire of Love*, St Bonaventure recalls once more the three degrees of the spiritual life; purification, illumination, and perfection; purification leads to peace (of conscience), illumination to truth, perfection to love. To traverse these three paths, meditation, prayer, and contemplation are necessary. By contemplation the soul is raised to true wisdom. By it we enter the heavenly Jerusalem. The Church militant should endeavour to emulate the Church triumphant. Now in heaven there are three great treasures—perfect peace, the sight of the sovereign truth, and the sweetness of perfect charity. So while in this world we should as far as possible gain the tranquillity of peace, the splendour of truth, the sweetness of charity, and thus advance along the three ways: the purgative way, which consists in expelling sin; the illuminative way, which consists in the imitation of Christ; and the unitive way, in which the soul receives the Holy Ghost.

4. *Franciscan Authors: David of Augsburg, Rudolf of Biberach, James of Milan, Henry of Baume.*

232 *b*. The other Franciscan authors teach the same doctrine as St Bonaventure. The earliest of these was David of Augsburg. His book, *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione*, better known by the title given to the third part, *De profectu religiosorum*, appeared while St Bonaventure was studying in Paris. David of Augsburg, indicating the course pursued by the faithful soul, and counting seven stages according to the number of the days of the week, says that the first six days should be devoted to labour, *sex dies sunt in quibus operari oportet*, so that having thus conquered evil inclinations, and acquired virtues, it might then attend to divine contemplation, and enjoy the repose of the Sabbath.

Rudolf of Biberach, in his celebrated work, *The Seven Roads to Eternity*, shows how to pass from meditation to contemplation, and then by contemplation to divine love, which love, having become perfect, is accompanied by great light, *revelatio*, and by a sweetness which imparts an experimental knowledge of God, *experientia;* finally, very meritorious works are the effect of this divine love.

233. In the *Goad of Love* (*Stimulus amoris*), a work which was held in great repute in the Middle Ages, the author,[1] who was decidedly inspired with the doctrines of St Bonaventure, indicates how to arrive at contemplation and perfection.

To attain the repose of contemplation, says he (pars 3, cap. i), three things are necessary: First, to humble oneself at the thought of one's own faults and to grieve over the sins of others; second, to bear Christ in one's heart, and to compasionate his sufferings; third, to be detached from everything that is not God.

It is impossible to become perfectly united to God unless the heart is free from all affection for creatures (cap. ii).

One can rapidly attain perfection, he says again (cap. iv). In fact, he who by contemplation would climb to the summit of the holy mountain should never rest, but always climb higher by the continual raising of his mind. To stop on the way, and, on pretence of taking a short holiday, to return to the valley of imperfections and superfluities is foolish. And it is on this account that so few arrive at the summit of the mountain. Those who work without truce to become perfect, and who go from one perfection to another, gain more in one month than those would in forty years who stop to rest and always return to the same point.

234. Among the writings of St Bonaventure there is a work entitled *Mystical Theology*, which was for a long time attributed to him, and has earned great authority. Hurter and many others attribute it to Blessed Henry of Baume, who was the Confessor of St Colette about 1400. It contains the same doctrine, as can be seen by the short summary of it that we give.

The author grieves because, as he says, too great a number of the faithful and of clerics seek only the pleasures of this world, and what is still worse, many religious men with a reputaion for holiness leave on one side that true wisdom by which God receives a perfect worship in the depths of the soul. They make a regular idol of knowledge and foolishly fill their minds with all sorts of learned arguments. Thus, at the instigation of the devil, they become so completely absorbed, and their

[1] The editors of the works of St Bonaventure (Quaracchi, 1904) attribute this treatise to the Friar-Minor James of Milan. The summary given here follows the edition of the works of St Bonaventure, which appeared at Lyons in 1668. A French translation of his treatise was edited in 1910 at the *Librairie Franciscaine*, Paris. An English translation exists (*The Goad of Divine Love*, London, Burns Oates and Washbourne).

minds so entirely engrossed with these studies, that there is no longer any room in them for true wisdom.

Not to this end did the Lord create the human soul, but rather that it might become the seat of wisdom. This wisdom is what is called mystical theology.

Taught by St Paul, and explained by St Dionysius, his disciple, mystical theology is nothing else but the act of the soul taking flight with loving desires and entering into God. It is written in the heart by divine illumination and with an altogether celestial effusion. It brings satisfaction to the soul, for by it the mind finds God its Creator and rests in him, who is the source of all goodness and of all beatitude. It warms the heart and enlightens the understanding. . . .

May the pious soul rise, therefore, by the intensity of its desires, and in the impetuosity of love to the source of all good, for there only will be found all truth.

Now there are three ways leading to God, the purgative wherein the soul prepares for the study of wisdom, the illuminative in which by the reflections of the mind the fire of divine love is enkindled; and the unitive way in which the soul aspires to God with an ardour surpassing all understanding and all reasoning. . . .

There, under the guidance and in the school of God the soul experiences what cannot be explained, that which neither Aristotle nor Plato nor any human science have ever been able to comprehend; and acquires a knowledge by unitive love with which reason has nothing to do.

This is mystical theology—namely, the mysterious language of God. It is sublime wisdom, a state which supposes every virtue. It cannot be too greatly desired, nor too laboriously sought.

"It is difficult to explain in what it consists; the only way of discovering is by following faithfully the exercises of the purgative and illuminative ways; then will the soul be raised to the unitive way, and having experienced the interior operations of God in this union, the teaching of the doctors of this science and the books treating of this subject will be intelligible . . . for this science, being very different from all those in which theory precedes practice, can only be understood by those who have experienced it" (*Prologue*).

235. It is by no means rash to aspire to this unitive way provided the other two ways have been successively practised. By prayer can be obtained that precious wisdom demanded by the Church in that beautiful passage in her Liturgy. "O Wisdom, who camest out of the

mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end mightily, and ordering all things sweetly, come to teach us the way of prudence."

This wisdom has been thus defined by St Dionysius: "It is the most perfect knowledge of God, resulting from a sublime ignorance, and is accomplished by virtue of an incomprehensible union. It is obtained by a renunciation of all things created, and a forgetfulness even of self. Then is the soul inundated with the divine glory and enlightened in the inscrutable abysses of an unfathomable wisdom."[1]

Such is the wisdom which imparts unitive love and which resides in the summit of the will; such is mystical theology, which no human effort can obtain, for it is a grace bestowed by divine mercy (cap. iii, part 1).

To be thus enlightened it is necessary to forsake self, and with the help of God be raised above self, and that there be some intercourse and resemblance between the Creator and the creature (part 2).

It is, then, by unitive love that the most perfect knowledge of God can be obtained, because the fervent desires that it produces give a more perfect idea of God than anything that can be learnt by study, instruction, or personal reflections. . . . Also how desirable for the Christian is this union with the divine Spouse, foretaste of future glory, and true nuptial diadem.

236. Having set forth at some length (part 2) the motives which should induce us to strive to obtain this precious grace, the author tells us by what means this unitive and mystical wisdom may be obtained. He explains (part 3) how we ought to pray, particularizing the circumstances of posture and time convenient for prayer; how to meditate on the Passion, and to produce fervent acts of love, in this way gradually becoming accustomed to the enjoyment of divine union. . . . Finally, he comments on the famous text of St Dionysius on mystical theology: "As for you, O Timothy, practise mystical contemplation without ceasing, etc."

These extracts from the writings of St Bonaventure, and the most celebrated spiritual authors of his Order, prove that the Franciscan school in the Middle Ages was unanimous in teaching the traditional mystical doctrine.

[1] *The Divine Names*, ch. vii, French translation by Mgr. Darboy.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

237. A GREAT school of mysticism took its rise in the fourteenth century in Germany and Flanders, the principal exponents of which deserve to rank next to the saintly doctors whose writings on this subject we have studied till now. Blessed Ruysbroeck, Tauler, Blessed Henry Suso have always been placed, and justly, in line with the great masters of the spiritual life.

I will but simply mention the first, being able to read his works only in translations.[1]

1. *Tauler.*

238. Tauler, the friend of Blessed Ruysbroeck, was born, like him, in the concluding years of the thirteenth century, and, entering the Order of St Dominic, obtained a great reputation as a preacher at Cologne and in the surrounding country. This illustrious son of St Dominic, who made known so well the advantages and fruits of contemplation and of union with God, was at the same time a relentless adversary of the Quietists, who had begun to propagate their errors in his time. Among the men most experienced in spirituality, Tauler has found enthusiastic admirers; for example, Louis of Blois, who defended him against unjust attacks. Bossuet has done homage to his great worth, and St John of the Cross drew his inspiration from his doctrine. His also were the first works that St Francis de Sales gave St Jane Chantal to read when she placed herself under his direction.[2]

(1) *Contemplation and the means of attaining it.*

239. One of the most celebrated of the works attributed to Tauler is that entitled the *Institutions*.[3]

[1] *Rusbrock l'admirable, Œuvres choisies*, par Ernest Hello, Paris, Poussielgue, 1869; *L'ornement des noces spirituelles*, traduit par M. Mæterlinck, Brussels, Lacomblez, 1900; new translation by the Benedictines of St Paul de Wisques, Brussels, 1917. Lessius is said to have spent the great part of his life reading Ruysbroeck, and to have learnt from him the art of dwelling in God and within himself. (Surin, *Amour de Dieu*, l. III, ch. v).

[2] Letter of October 14th, 1604.

[3] It seems to be admitted at the present time that this remarkable work is not, strictly speaking, by Tauler, but that the teaching contained

In the seventh chapter of this work the author shows how peacefully the perfect man acts, and how his spirit, detached from everything earthly, and even, as far as it is possible, from the body and its senses, takes its flight to God by fervent and loving contemplation.

"Having reached this state of self-forgetfulness, and of having always in view the glory of God alone, when man[1] begins to act he finds a kind of peace, a holy tranquillity impossible to describe, in his exterior senses, which formerly were too eagerly and actively employed on outward objects. It is then that the mind, as though by a last effort of its powers, the nature of which is so elevated, leaves the body, discards it, and attains a certain supernatural experience of divine things. In proportion as it strips itself and severs itself from the earthly nature to which it is united is it raised to the height of spiritual riches and perfection in striving to penetrate ever more deeply within the circle which represents the eternal God.[2] In truth, the real good of the soul, and its most precious treasure, consists in getting rid of the weight of vice and rising, by the help of grace, to the light of understanding, wherein is received an incessant influx of heavenly consolation, and all things are beheld as they are. In this way man always acts according to the dictates of prudence, and remains happily freed by the Son and in the Son—that is to say, by the truth and in the truth—and when he turns back to creatures he sees them as they are. This is what may be called a flight or rapture of the mind, which, transcending time and space, is caught up even to the bosom of God himself by fervent and loving contemplation."

240. But none can reach this height without having practised a generous mortification and complete detachment.

"Before being able to arrive at this state of perfect detachment it will be necessary to overcome and conquer

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in it is derived from the works of Tauler and of other German mystics of the fourteenth century. "If one considers," says Dr. Zahn, "the relatively considerable number of editions of the works of Tauler given out in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, it is surprising to find them so little in request in our days." (*Die christliche Mystik*, p. 37. Paderborn, 1908).

[1] The French text here reproduces the translation of the Dominican Fathers of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, third edition, Paris, 1681, with the exception of slight modifications derived from a German edition which appeared at Frankfort in 1822.

[2] Compare the saying of St Bonaventure (No. 229, above) borrowed from Alain de Lille: God is "like an intelligible sphere, the centre of which is everywhere and the circumference nowhere."

nature by many kinds of mortification, so that the spiritual man will thereafter act only from motives of truth and virtue. . . . As long as a man does not mortify his senses, understanding and will, and makes no effort exteriorly and interiorly in body and mind, he will remain imperfect, and will not deserve to be enlightened and to be baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit."

Faults of frailty and imperfections do not prevent the reception of the grace of perfect love.

"Humble and submissive persons subject themselves to God and to every creature for the love of him in a spirit of true resignation. It is true that few, when some disagreeable event occurs, can perfectly control the first movements; God permits this, sometimes for a long while, in order that the knowledge of their frailty should make them humble themselves profoundly. However, when they are tormented by either physical or mental suffering they at once recollect themselves, and the charity, kindness, and patience they have acquired get the upper hand. Raising their hearts to God by acts of hope and charity, they triumph over all their faults and become dead to the disturbance of the senses. Then they retire into themselves in order to practise acts of piety, patience, love, and humility. It is then that the Holy Spirit inspires them with a solid knowledge, or rather, with a wisdom that strengthens, directs, and guides them to the perfection of every virtue in teaching them how to behave towards God, towards themselves, and towards every creature.

241. . . . "Here, then, are the three things that will render them victorious and triumphant in every kind of combat:

First, they must watch carefully over their senses and grant them no kind of liberty. . . .

Second, they must practise constant and fervent prayer, which, like a fountain of living water, will wash and purify their interior.

Third, they should participate in the Passion of Jesus Christ, imprinting the spirit of his sufferings on their hearts with ever-increasing love. . . . Should they experience any sensual feelings, having recourse at once to Jesus Christ, they should enter into the depths of his wounds, in which, all evil desires being compelled to leave them, they can suffer no harm. And thus these persons, having freed themselves from all imaginations and pretences, obtain by their purity of conscience a true peace, in which they continue absorbed in the sovereign good in a most simple manner, quite hidden and super-

natural. They therefore enter, by this renunciation of all outward show, into a holy obscurity, thus following the will of God, the only rule of their life, for they make a complete renunciation of self both for time and eternity."

(2) *Naked faith.*

242. St John of the Cross will speak later of naked faith; that is to say, a faith stripped of all its usual accompaniments, such as striking and touching considerations, sensible sweetness, and consolation. It is evident that in this he was inspired by Tauler, who was the first to make use of these terms, and who so well showed the advantage of this naked faith.

"*On the manner of using the gifts of God, on the recovery of grace, and on the simplicity of naked faith*" (ch. viii).

". . . If anyone were so faithful to God and to himself as to do everything without consolation or relief, it would give much more glory to God as well as being of greater use to himself. . . . It is certain that those who desire to receive constant favours and consolations in this world will naturally receive less in the world to come. . . . The knowledge, feeling and experience of some sweetness in this life is the reward that some people receive who would have greater occasion to rejoice if they possessed instead a simple, naked faith without any other knowledge, for the more pure, simple, and naked it is, the more laudable, noble, and meritorious. . . . See, then, what a truly great thing it is to have a naked faith. I call it 'naked,' not because it is devoid of good works, but because it does not desire to know anything whatever, nor to be filled with any sensible consolation.

"Now true perfection does not consist in receiving revelations and consolations, and what proves this is that when consolations and sensible devotion are taken away the person often becomes more imperfect and more given to vice than before. These consolations and encouragements are the portion of the feeble and of beginners; but as these gradually improve and become more virtuous and steady they find themselves deprived of these consolations, and have no other means of salvation than to attach themselves strongly to a simple naked faith. The Lord, it is true, does not at the time communicate to them any particular light, but nevertheless it is then that they possess him more abundantly, and it is on this account that they who apply themselves to mortify and overcome their self-

will, in prosperity as well as in adversity, attain, much sooner than others, by true and sincere resignation and simple faith, the summit of perfection."

(3) *Union with God.*

243. Let us quote the following extracts, which exactly apply to the doctrine we have to prove.

"*Of the end of all perfection, which consists in uniting the soul and all its powers with God*" (ch. xxv).

"The principle and source of all the graces bestowed on the spiritual man is to remain always in his room in recollection, and to acquire an exact knowledge of his defects and to learn by the fervour of his devotion to the wounds and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and by the practice of moral virtues, to accept good and evil with equanimity, and even to be grateful for them as coming from the hand of God, and to persevere cheerfully in this state of desire and will.

"On the contrary, the source and origin of all evil is the useless employment of our exterior senses—vain and frivolous gossip, and friendship and familiar intercourse with men, which is usually so fruitless. This is why those who conceive a strong aversion for ill-regulated affections, and for all those pleasures that lead them away from God, hasten, as much as the frailty of nature allows, to enter into themselves with profound humility and perfect resignation to the divine will, and why, turning their eyes from visible objects, those of the soul remain in innocence and true and constant tranquillity. They should prevent their minds from being filled with the ideas and representations of visible and perishable things, in order to apply them and raise them to the contemplation of things eternal. They should free the will and desire from the troubles, pleasures, fears, and love of the goods of this world, and occupy themselves incessantly in heartfelt and fervent wishes and prayers, and in heavenly thoughts. They should urge their hearts to remain always attached with ties of love to the sovereign Good, and they will then possess true spiritual and temporal riches by the practice of poverty of spirit and of the affections. Filling the memory only with heavenly subjects, they will be occupied solely with the Supreme Being, the essential and uncreated Good. In this way, uniting their souls to God with their whole power and strength, they will become one spirit with him, and thus, filled with the fervour of divine love and resting in God, they will listen in profound peace to his words. No sooner do they understand that the Lord wishes them to make more progress in the spiritual life than they re-

linquish all those particular practices with which they usually busied themselves, in order to enter the holy obscurity of an eloquent silence, during which God will make them understand and see their own nothingness and that of all creatures in that superessential light, never extinguished, in which he dwells.

244. "As to other exercises, such as meditation, prayer, fasting, watching, etc., these ought to have relation to their end, which is this loving union of which we have spoken, and should not be undertaken except with prudence and discretion, and only in so far as they prove useful. Now, the reason why so few people succeed in this is because they are fickle and flighty, and devote little or no zeal to the endeavour to overcome their faults and evil inclinations, to obtain purity of heart, and to remain constantly striving after union with God. It is true that no mortal creature, as long as he is living in the midst of the corruption of the flesh, can remain perpetually in this sublime state of contemplation, but at least let him not ever lose sight of this union with God, who is the end of all spiritual exercises and to union with whom every effort of fervour and zeal should tend, and to which he should return directly he perceives that he is wandering from it even but for a moment.

245. "As long as we continue united to God let us rejoice and return thanks to him; when, on the contrary, we feel deprived of this happiness, let us sigh, groan, and make every effort to enter into ourselves. If at first we find some difficulty in doing so, do not let us be disheartened about it, because often, as experience proves, that which we began with some amount of difficulty and trouble will gradually, by practise, become easy and, if we persevere, even end by causing satisfaction and pleasure.

"In short, if we wish to make progress in virtue, let us imagine ourselves before our heavenly Father, who is actually present everywhere, and that we hear him repeating these words to us over and over: 'Dearest children, enter into yourselves, and as much as possible detach yourselves from all created things; seek after purity of heart by turning your minds away from all these images of vanity and nothingness, and by detaching your will and your heart from the love of the things that are visible.' Let us add to this, by a gentle effort, a continual remembrance of God, uniting ourselves closely to him with fervour, so that our souls, being concentrated in contemplation with their whole strength and all their faculties, become, as we have said, one spirit with him.

"This is an abridgement of all sanctity, by means of which we shall easily reach the goal, which is the highest pitch of perfection. Alas! this perfection is so seldom sought that we hardly find one single person in a thousand who attempts it; each spends a lifetime and consumes his powers in useless occupations, and thus most of the days pass without any spiritual progress being made; and that grace to which none other can be compared is neglected through a deplorable blindness. May he, therefore, who hopes to become happily freed from all sin, and to practise every virtue, make his retreat in God and there remain, making of God himself a camp wherein to pitch his tent, and he will triumph over all his enemies. . . .

"Trample, then, underfoot everything—yourself as well as heaven, earth, and all things contained therein; cast all into God and dwell in him, keeping, if it is permitted so to speak,[1] an essential union with him. Why should you, by a strange disorder, place your affections and seek your pleasure in mortal creatures with whom, notwithstanding, you can have no union, while you might in some degree be transformed into God? Offer yourself, therefore, to him with all these creatures and with all the affection and inclination that you have for them, and without doubt, having made this sacrifice for his glory and to do his holy will, you will make greater progress in true virtue in a single day than, by retaining your self-love, you would make in thirty years or more."

(4) *The true friends of God.*

246. In the thirty-sixth chapter the author teaches that to recognize if a servant of God has truly mortified his will and transformed it into the divine will one should examine:

"Firstly, if he give no consent to any sin; secondly, if he be willing to practise all the virtues that God requires of him; thirdly, if he be ready to endure everything for the love of God; fourthly, if he renounce all that could prevent his union with God; fifthly, if the honour and glory of God be his aim and end in every circumstance. . . . It is easy to say, 'I hope and desire that God may be glorified

[1] *Wenn uns anders der Ausdruck erlaubt ist.* The author felt that the expression of which he had made use was too strong; however close this union with God may be, it cannot be called an essential union. Doubtless the pious author intended to point out that this union was effected in the depths of the soul, since it continues even when the powers are occupied with other objects (*vide* above, No. 14), but the word "essential" is none the less inexact.

in me and in all creatures,' but it is extremely difficult to work for that alone, and continually. Only the perfect are capable of it, because, being entirely dead to themselves, they remain always . . . contented and steadfast in the immutable essence of the truth. Sixthly, if, thus persevering in the essential truth, he withdraw constantly into the hidden and unknown will of God, and therein strip himself of his own will in such a way that he can no longer be said to have one. . . . Then indeed this is the supreme union of the human will with the divine, and a kind of annihilation of the one in the other.

"Now, the principal cause of all these efforts is none other than the Passion of Jesus Christ, in which whosoever enters is washed and purified of all that is outside God. He attaches himself and unites himself in a perfect and thorough manner to this sovereign Being, and so ascends to the highest degree of perfection, in which he can easily obtain all that he asks of God. . . ."

247. "*How far the secret friends of God are useful in this world, and by what means we may recognize them* (ch. xxxvii; German edition, ch. xxxvi).

"All who have become such as I have just explained, although they may be hidden and unknown to the world, are the true friends of God, and by the fervour of their prayers help and sustain Christianity. . . .

"Those only who are like to them can recognize them, because their sanctity is like gold hidden in the mines of the earth, not to be discovered by those loaded with the cares of the things of this world. . . .

"They dwell always in the present moment, without being preoccupied or troubled inordinately about the past or the future. They see God in everything, in small things as well as in great. . . .

"No one, however, can arrive at this degree of perfection without having expended all his energies, because the long practice of mortification weakens and emaciates the body. . . .

"During prayer these servants of God keep all their senses in recollection . . . therefore a certain light diffused over the higher faculties of the soul makes them see that God takes the place of their essence,[1] life, and action, and that they are nothing more than his instruments, his servants, and his adorers. Outwardly they eat, drink, and sleep, but their spirit is not occupied with these animal actions, and these and all their other

[1] Here we must make the same remark as in No. 245.

actions are referred to the glory of God. . . . They do not practise many interior exercises, and seldom speak, and all that they do is done with great simplicity. . . . They do not all live alike, and their exterior conduct differs according to the diversity of circumstances and events, but nevertheless, the depth of their soul and the centre of their spirit remain always the same. . . .

"In fine, as they have nothing to prevent them being always recollected in God, they also always preserve a free and perfect union with him by their love, and always have him before their eyes. Oh, that you could understand what you lose! you who do not, like them, preserve liberty of spirit and know not how to seek and to find God in himself. You lose considerably more spiritual graces in one hour only than if you should have lost the empire of the entire universe."

(5) *God alone.*

248. "*Abridgement of the Institutions contained in three points. In what manner we should abandon ourselves in order to give ourselves entirely to God* (ch. xxvi; German edition, ch. xxxix).

"Here are three points which contain in an abridged form all that has been treated more at length in this work.

"The first is that whosoever desires to raise himself to a high degree of sanctity and to be admitted among the number of the particular friends of God, whosoever would love him with all the powers of his soul, and his neighbour as himself, and enjoy him even in this world, should at all costs stifle in his heart all the deceitful joy and pleasure that he could take in anything that is not God, rejecting absolutely all that flatters nature.

249. ". . . The second point is that he who wishes to attain in this world, or in the world to come, to the knowledge of the sovereign truth, ought to retrench all pleasures, even of the mind, about all those things in which he might take complacency. It often happens that after cutting off outward things one gives way inwardly to certain pleasures of the mind that take their rise in ideas or workings of the understanding. Such a one seeks to satisfy himself; he takes himself for his object and end, and thus closes the door to the true light, and this divine light can no longer diffuse in him its pure and brilliant rays. The exercises in which he indulges, his reflections, recollections, etc., have for end more the satisfaction of nature than of God himself, and, although good in themselves, on this account they become an obstacle to the pure light.

"This destitution and mortification of the mind is incomparably more difficult, but also much more salutary than that of the body; for the great practices of corporal mortification such as frequent prayer, kneeling for a length of time, fasting, watching, and other pious works of a similar nature are sweet and agreeable to the eyes of the mind. . . .

"But the mortification of the mind . . . is death to self-complacency. Even in the performance of good works it is necessary to despoil oneself of all imaginations, of all ideas, of all ways of acting that satisfy nature; one must, in a word, even in doing good, renounce all self-will, all satisfaction, without, however, omitting any occasion of doing good or of practising good works.

"This is truly to mortify and to annihilate oneself; it is a kind of abnegation, of death, of destruction, which proves that a man puts God first and seeks rest in God alone. By him who acts thus, and in him, God accomplishes as he pleases his divine will; God alone wills, acts, enlightens, exists in such a man, and he has no other will, no other action, no other light, nor even any other existence—at least, if not absolutely and as regards his own nature, yet in a certain manner, inasmuch as he is entirely absorbed in God; so that of himself he has neither movement, nor action, nor desire, and seeks nothing for himself, either for time or eternity.

250. "The third point is that after a man has broken all the ties that bound him outwardly and inwardly, and after having learnt to lean only on his own nothingness, it is then given him to unite himself to the pure and unmixed good—no other than God, the infinitely good and infinitely powerful. This union has, however, to be essential in some measure, for the spirit enters into God entirely and not only as regards one of its faculties. This is why it is true to say that this union is essential, entire, indivisible, and perfect; for the spirit, on its side, never separates itself from God, and, on his side, God always corresponds essentially. Man in this state receives God in an essential way, not by means of images or in meditations, not by certain mental processes, nor by some sort of taste and light, but himself,[1] and in a way that greatly transcends

[1] There is evidently some qualification to be applied to these words of the great mystic, or, at least, an explanation of them to give. It is certain that union with God is not effected by the vision of the divine Essence, but as in it God is perceived without form, without image, without sensible appearance, as he is conceived as immeasurably superior to all the qualities that can be attributed to him, then this is the nearest approach to a right notion of the divine Essence that can be

all reason, all taste, all feeling, in a most incomprehensible manner. Man finds himself, then, as though enveloped in a cloud, but God enlightens him himself by his Essence, he who is ineffable and infinitely superior to all the titles by which men endeavour to describe him, who subsists solely of, and in, himself, for the divine Essence cannot be described by any name. . . . We give God many names and attributes—good, merciful, just, etc—which do not describe him as he is, because, according to his nature, he has neither name, nor image, nor form, nor qualities, and is free from every accident.

"If God be known in this way, the act by which we turn to him becomes a real and essential conversion; it takes place in one moment and cannot be expressed in words. He who is perfect can renew it a thousand times a day or during the night, so that by each one of these conversions he will be essentially united to God and will merit the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision. Oh, how desirable is this conversion, and how everyone should endeavour to free himself from every impediment, and to break the chains of his captivity in order to direct all his affections and all the attention of his soul towards this perfect light, in order to receive and to feel the warmth and brilliance of its glorious rays, even if but for one moment! Men who are perfect and who, consequently, are detached from earthly things, having once set forth in this path, hardly ever diverge from it except when human frailty or the course of events oblige them to interrupt for a moment the continuance of this transient splendour. But they no sooner perceive this interruption than, abandoning all other things, they re-enter into union with the supreme Being, and expend all the power of their minds in this exercise alone, having neither attraction nor desire for anything but the loving outpouring of the Divinity and to prepare a way for God in their hearts. Their only desire is that the work of God may be freely accomplished in them, and that the heavenly Father may bring forth his Word

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arrived at in this life without a miracle. This conception of God is vague, it is true, and impossible to explain, but it is the most correct and the most perfect to be had. Nevertheless, inasmuch as this idea bears no resemblance to ideas which proceed by affirmation, in that the soul, being unable to express it clearly to itself, remains as if in silence and as if only striving to exercise love, inasmuch as it is satisfied often to enjoy the possession of God, to whom it feels intimately and inseparably united, it must not be concluded, as have certain authors, that there is no idea in it, but only an act of the will without any operation of the understanding (*cf.* Suarez, *De orat.*, ch. xii), nor said that it is the divine Essence itself which is manifested to the soul as in the intuitive vision.

without delay, that Word begotten of him from all eternity, and that he would carry out the designs of his divine Will in the purest, the most excellent, and most secret part of the soul, wherever, whenever, and however it should please him.

"To arrive at this state requires a perpetual subjection to the will of God, a profound humility of the mind, a real self-abasement, and an entire and sincere abnegation; to sink into one's own nothingness and understand one's eternal origin, which is God, to forget oneself and all men and all things that are not God, and, detaching oneself from all ideas and images of irrelevant things, have no other object in view than God alone, so that, having thus attracted and united him to oneself, all other objects become strange and almost unknown. Truly those who live in this way are the most perfect in this world; they are more useful to the Church in the space of one hour than all those who live differently would be during many years, because one single recollection interiorly, and one glance of this sort at God, is worth more than a great number of works and of exercises that are accomplished without this disposition. In this holy practice can be found an assured peace and a life truly resembling that of God. And this it is which is an abridgement of all that has been set forth more at length in this book, both as to what has already been written and as to that which will follow."

(6) *The transition from meditation to contemplation.*

251 "*Some thoughts on which we should meditate, and the means of arriving at true poverty of spirit by rejecting imagery as serving for matter of meditation* (ch. xxxv).

"Someone will, perhaps, ask me if every kind of imagery should be banished, and whether one ought to attach oneself to God only by love. To which I reply that there are two ways of detaching oneself from all imagery to cleave only to God, one of which is useful, the other dangerous; because if you discard images that are good without having recognized their virtue, you would be acting imprudently and unreasonably, because it would be depriving your understanding of a knowledge of truth which you might have acquired by means of these images. But what may these representations be which you must not reject before having penetrated their meaning? First, a man must consider his past life and his present conduct still so defective, with a poignant contrition and a strong

hatred. Secondly, he must try to understand the life and the conduct of our Saviour. Thirdly, he must endeavour as much as in him lies to realize the bitter Passion and death endured by Jesus for love of us. These, of all others, are the most useful ideas and conceptions that we can have, and he who has neither considered and searched into them can never hope to reach a high level. What, then, are the highest of all these thoughts and conceptions? Those which point out the profound and incomprehensible union between the divine and human natures, the nobility, excellence, and value of the human soul; in fine, the sacred body of our Saviour.

"What, then, are the best and clearest images? They are those which faith causes us to form. Firstly, of the three Persons of the adorable Trinity. Secondly, of the eternal generation of the Son, and of his circumincession in the Father by whom he is generated, and also of the procession of the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and who dwells in them. Thirdly, of the essence of the Divinity, at the same time simple and infinite. It is by thinking on these divine objects, as much as our obscure faith is capable, that ideas and images are formed which surpass all others in clearness. Now, if we would know why it is necessary to renounce all those representations which were formerly so useful to us, and were so lofty and so pure, it is because they were only the means to lead us to the simple and naked truth. If, then, we desire to arrive at this truth we must leave behind us little by little the path which led to it. . . .

"For the rest, there are three signs[1] by which we may know when we can reasonably reject these images, so that we may neither drive them away too soon nor yet retain them longer than is necessary. Firstly, when we feel a distaste for all that we imagine and for everything that we hear spoken;[2] secondly, when nothing that occurs to our minds, or strikes our ears, gives us any pleasure; thirdly, when we feel in our hearts a craving and an ardent desire for the sovereign Good, to whom, nevertheless, we know not how to attain, and to whom we exclaim with an eagerness which incessantly urges us: 'My Lord and my God,

[1] The teaching of St John of the Cross must be compared with this doctrine. (*Ascent of Carmel,* l. II, ch. xi; old editions ch. xiii. Cf. *Degrees,* l. v, pt. i, ch. vii).

[2] It is evident that by these words the author would not advise the complete exclusion from the mental view, always, or even for any length of time, of the sacred humanity of our Saviour; no one has more recommended meditation on the Passion or reflection on the life of Jesus.

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I can make no further progress; I can only pray to you, and it is for you to answer my prayer.' When anyone is urged on in this way, not only may he reject all these images of which we are speaking, however holy, but he ought rightly to do so.

"But you will not fail to ask me to what can the mind attach itself if it repel thus all sorts of images? It adheres to nothing else but love, and remains absolutely bare and free,[1] for if it leant on anything, that prop would itself be an image. It takes, therefore, a share in the sufferings and the cross of love, from which it desires never to be delivered unless the Creator himself deliver it. . . .

"Finally, if we would know who is truly poor and crucified, it is he who is striving sincerely and with all his might to understand the highest that his mind can grasp, is left without consolation, abandoned by God and by all creatures, so that he receives no sort of solace either from him or from them or from himself. And, indeed, no one can enjoy interiorly the essential Truth unless he can accustom himself to the deprivation of God—that is to say, of the comfort of his presence—with the same freedom and detachment with which he desires and seeks him. . . ."

2. *Blessed Henry Suso.*

252. We have no intention of recounting here the admirable and touching life of Blessed Henry Suso, one of the glories of the Order of St Dominic, nor of establishing his authority, which has never been contested,[1] but give simply some extracts from his works: these will show what, according to Blessed Henry Suso, is the straight path to perfection.[2]

(1) *How we ought to live interiorly.*

253. "Lord, many are the rules, many are the ways of a godly life; some are of one kind, some of another. Many and various are the ways; the writings are inexhaustible, their precepts innumerable. Teach me, O eternal Wisdom, in a few words, out of the abyss of all

[1] In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the *Book of Eternal Wisdom*, says P. Thiriot, was the book most read in Germany.

[2] I borrow the following passages from the edition of Fr. Thiriot, *Œuvres mystiques du Bienheureux Suso*, Paris, Lecoffre, 1899. This is a very faithful translation, and the very slight modifications that I have seen fit to make of it from the original seem to me to render more exactly the thought of Blessed Henry Suso. [Note in original French ed.] The extracts from the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* are here given from the English translation (London, Burns Oates and Washbourne).

the things they contain, to what I ought chiefly to hold fast in the way of a truly pious life.

"*Eternal Wisdom:* The truest, most useful, and most practical doctrine for thee in all the Scriptures that, in a few words, will more than amply convince thee of all the truth requisite for the attainment of the summit of perfection in a godly life is this doctrine: Keep thyself secluded from all mankind, keep thyself free from the influence of all external things, disenthral thyself from all that depends on chance or accident, and direct thy mind at all times on high in secret and divine contemplation, wherein, with a steady gaze from which thou never swervest, thou hast me before thy eyes. And as to other exercises, such as poverty, fasting, watching, and every other castigation, bend them all to this as to their end, and use just so much and so many of them as may advance thee to it. Behold, thus wilt thou attain to the loftiest pitch of perfection, that not one person in a thousand comprehends, because, with their end in view, they all continue in other exercises, and so go astray the long years.

254. "*The Servant:* Lord, who can exist in the unswerving grace of thy divine vision at all times?

"*Eternal Wisdom:* No one who lives here below in this temporal scene. This has been said to thee only that thou mightest know at what thou shouldst aim, after what thou shouldst strive, to what thou shouldst turn thy heart and mind. And if ever thou losest sight of it, let it be to thee as if thy eternal salvation were taken away from thee; and do thou speedily turn to it again, so that thou mayest again obtain possession of it; and then must thou look carefully to thyself, for, if it escape from thee, thou art like a sailor from whose grasp the oars in a strong swell have slipped, and who does not know whither he shall direct his course. But if thou mayest not as yet have a constant abiding-place in divine contemplation, let the perpetually repeated collecting of thy wandering thoughts, and the assiduous withdrawing of thyself to engage in it, procure thee constancy so far as it is possible" (*Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. xxii).

(2) *True perfection.*

255. "*Estote perfecti* (Matt. v, 48). Thus speaks the eternal Wisdom to his chosen disciples who aspire after a perfect life. 'Be ye perfect!' Dionysius, who is so enlightened, says in his book *The Heavenly Hierarchies* (ch. viii, § 1, and ch. vii, § 3) that the lower angels are

purified, enlightened, and perfected by the higher angels, and that this is effected in the dazzling rays of the super-essential Sun[1] by a participation in the emanation from on high, in a new and irradiating truth.

"Something of the same kind can be found here among men. Purification consists in the expulsion of the creature, or of that which proceeds from the creature, in so far as one is attached to it, either inadvertently, by paying no attention to it, or by desire. . . .

"After purification come the light and the truth, for the truth is the light which disperses the darkness of ignorance. Light is sometimes received through an intermediary, sometimes without an intermediary; it renews the soul in joy and fills it with divine thoughts. The more light a man receives, the more does he detach himself from earthly things, and the more also does he merit the immortal vesture of future light which will have no end.

"And in this is true perfection, which consists in the union of the highest powers of the soul with him who is the principle of all being, by means of high contemplation to which one gives oneself up with an ardent love, and in the supreme enjoyment of the sovereign Good, as far as the weakness of our mortal frame will allow. But as the soul, in consequence of being kept back by the weakness of the body, cannot remain constantly attached, simply and without images, to the all-pure Good, it requires the help of some mental representation to recall it. And I believe that the lovable image of Jesus Christ is the best for that purpose, because one finds therein both God and man, one finds him who has sanctified the saints, one finds therein life, the highest recompense, and derives therefrom the greatest profit. Also, when a man is conformed to this image, he is transformed by the Spirit of God into the divine glory of the Lord of Heaven, from light to light, from the light of his tender humanity to the light of his divinity. For the more often we contemplate him in a loving manner with the eyes of desire, and the more entirely we conform our life to his, the more glory shall we enjoy in the eternity of his essential beatitude" (*Little Book of Letters*, Let. X).

(3) *The obstacles to be overcome, and the means to make use of in order to attain perfection.*

256. ". . . He who would arrive at great perfection has many obstacles to overcome. Nine can be counted,

[1] God himself.

but we will only speak of the four smallest. In the first place, the senses must be kept under control, and one must raise oneself above all that is sensible; afterwards the powers of the body and of nature must be kept in subjection; in the third place, every desire must be subdued, and finally one must rise above all images and all imaginations.

"In the first place, all the senses must be vanquished. Here we shall not speak of persons who are living in voluntary mortal sin by satisfying all the desires of the senses, but only of those who wish to rise with Christ and to ascend to heaven. There are people capable of speaking of heavenly things, not from their own experience, but simply because they have heard others speak of them, or because they have read about them; therefore their knowledge is gained entirely through the senses. This is like those knights who prove their courage by threats and are intrepid in talk.[1] He who would be perfect should die to all curiosity of the senses and to all desire of showing himself off. He should overcome these two tendencies.

"A man (very likely Blessed Henry Suso himself) often had a desire to know the most holy will of God. Our Lord appeared to him and said: 'You must guard your senses, hold your tongue, gain mastery over your heart, suffer joyfully for my sake all contradiction; this is my holy will. Turn away from those things represented to you by the senses, in order to incline interiorly, and you will experience that which was said by the Psalmist: '*The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*' (Ps. iv, 7). Some people of good intentions are much occupied with exterior things, and hardly ever take any rest. What ought they to do? If they have any spare time, they should unite themselves with God all the more deeply as during this short time they have to make good the forty years they have lost by serving their senses, and to gather thus all the more fruit.

"You must not imitate certain persons who cannot realize the presence of God except by means of sensible images or by reading beautiful and learned books; the Spirit of God must be sought in the innermost sanctuary of the soul, in its most secret recesses, in order to speak to him spirit to spirit, mind to mind, as our sweet Saviour has said: 'God is a spirit, and they that adore him adore him in spirit and in truth' (John iv, 24). God understands

[1] However learned and fluent those who live entirely in exterior things may appear, in reality their piety is only a show and an appearance of devotion.

the language of the heart, the language of the soul. He hears the words that come from the depths of the soul. The intensity of Mary's feelings and her mere presence were a prayer which reached the ears of Christ more speedily and in a more holy manner than all the words and complaints of Martha.

257. "In the second place, the powers of nature must be overcome interiorly and exteriorly. How can the spiritual life be perfectly understood and practised if the natural powers and vigour be kept intact? This would be a real miracle, and I have never yet encountered anyone to whom it has happened; if by chance such a case should occur, I should like it to be made known. St Bernard did not go so far, for he complained of having weakened his body; neither did St Gregory, that light of Christianity. Let no one, then, delude himself with the idea of having acquired what is, in fact, out of his reach, or that which is still a thing of which he knows nothing; he must work and suffer, for that which costs nothing is worth nothing. He who wishes to gain love must in the first place abandon love.[1]

"There is also another power to be overcome, and this is our inner sense.[2] It is to be encountered even when no attention is paid to outer objects, and a man will find in himself a crowd of imaginations. God knows how numerous they are; he thinks first of one thing, then of another, now in one way, and in a little while in another, so that interiorly he is quite uneasy. This must be altered and brought back entirely to simplicity, to the only good, which is God. One of the masters remarked when he saw before him a huge block of stone: 'Ah, what a beautiful statue this would make if only there were someone to carve it!' The Lord has said: 'If thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth' (Jer. xv, 19). Ah, if one separated, if one polished, if one carved, one would find God in oneself!

258. "The third power is that of reason. Man must raise himself above it. Some people employ their reasoning powers so much, and make so much of them, that they seem to wish to pierce the sky, and yet they rise no higher than their natural powers can carry them. . . . Such persons must labour assiduously to suppress this tendency. Others, on the contrary, are simple, remain simple, and

[1] That is to say, he who wishes to attain the love of God ought to put aside all love of his own body.

[2] *Den gemeinen Sinn*, the sense which represents all objects in general, which is therefore the inner sense, the imagination.

receive everything simply; interiorly they are tranquil, and resemble a wave in which a vessel is reflected, but directly the waves break everything disappears.[1] It is the same with people who possess this power of reasoning. When a figure has been carved in stone with great trouble, it remains and is not effaced so quickly.

259. "In the third place, all desire must be overcome and all strong cravings put down. We do not here allude to those who desire perishable things (for by desiring fortune, honours, and other temporal goods they are a hundred thousand miles away from perfection); we only refer to certain good persons, who, possessing excellent qualities and leading a holy life, indulge in a good many desires and keep repeating from morning to night: 'Ah, if only God would grant me this or that, if he would give me this grace, or reveal this to me, if only I were like So-and-So, if only I had such or such a disposition!' No; one must not speak like this; one must abandon oneself entirely to God, desire only him, place everything absolutely and faithfully in his hands, and repeat with Christ, not only with the lips, but also most fervently with the heart: 'Father, not my will but thine be done.' What a good thing it would be to abandon oneself in every way with perfect resignation in every pain as our sweet Saviour did! He was perfectly resigned, more so than any creature has ever been. He exclaimed, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and when all had been consummated he abandoned himself to the will of his Father, saying: *Consummatum est.* It is thus that a man should abandon himself to God in all his sufferings and in all his troubles. Do not imagine, however, that, having done this, you will suffer no more, for if there were no suffering where would the merit be? If our Lord Jesus Christ had put his finger in the fire he would have felt the pain of the burn.

"Therefore, then, in all your pains and all your desires abandon yourself to the will of God. If anyone still desires something that is beyond what he has, or is put out about what he already possesses, it is because he has not yet arrived at the state of abandonment; it is because he is not yet perfectly resigned. It was once revealed to a man how he ought to abandon himself to the will of God. He should act as though he were in the

[1] Such simple and peaceful souls, not retaining for any length of time the impression of things seen or heard, return more quickly to holy thoughts, and do not lose their union with God. The others, on the contrary, who reason and reflect on all that strikes their senses, remain occupied thereby, and have much more trouble to keep recollected.

middle of the sea and had only his cloak to sit upon, with no land in sight. What can he do? It is impossible to be heard, and he cannot swim, so as to cross the sea; there is nothing to be done but to abandon himself to God. In like manner the man who desires to be truly resigned should abandon himself to God in everything. . . . Only this should be desired—to be delivered by God from everything that obstructs our intimate union with him. For it is by this that all our sins disappear and that we obtain every good thing and all beatitude.

260. "In the fourth place, we must free ourselves from all imaginations and ideas. . . . We find some people who have need of imagery and yet remain good, but this occasions them many temptations and causes them numberless distractions. It is necessary to free ourselves from all this in order to think only of God; we must tell him about it and about our faults, and if these temptations do not disappear we must endure them with resignation. Some people indulge in imaginations and dreams; in their sleep they see beautiful things and even future events, and see saints and souls. I do not condemn this, for the angel appeared to St Joseph in his sleep; neither do I encourage it, for dreams may have a natural cause, as Boethius said: 'Whoever has pure thoughts will have pure dreams, and whoever indulges in silly, senseless thoughts will have senseless dreams.' There are others, also, who have visions and revelations, but even were these visions true and good during ten years the spirit of lies might at length find an opportunity to meddle with them, to deceive these persons, and involve them in error. In all such revelations be careful to consult the Holy Scriptures. Have recourse to the holy Gospels, to the teaching of holy Church. If you find agreement with you, be at ease; otherwise repel these revelations. If you value the friendship of God and have any regard for your eternal salvation, do not follow them, pay no attention to them, cast them far from you.

"It is in this way that you ought to enter into yourself not leaning at all on the revelations of God and the saints. Rest on the will of God for everything—in abundance, in poverty, when you possess things, when you have nothing, in joy as well as in sorrow—after the admirable example of Christ.

261. "May Christ be ever present in the centre of your heart and of your soul; imprint his likeness there and contemplate him without ceasing; consider the exalted perfection of his life, of his conduct, of his soul; see how

resigned, simple, chaste, humble, patient, and full of virtue he was, and abandon yourself to him. Take him with you as your companion in all your actions. When you take a mouthful of food, imagine that your dear Lord is opposite to you and that he is eating with you. If you are seated, that he is sitting at your side and observing you. You need not walk alone, for he will always accompany you. If you sleep, sleep in him, and act in this way everywhere, in every circumstance, and in every society. I know a man who, to become more perfectly like our Lord, went from place to place meditating on Christ's works, as if he were trying to gain an indulgence. St Bernard recommends beginners to place themselves in spirit before a man who leads a regular life, and to ask themselves before beginning an action, or omitting one: 'Would you dare to say or to do this if this holy man could see you?' How much the more should we imprint within us the holy likeness of our Saviour, who is in reality nearer to us than we are to ourselves? For in him is all consolation, all good, all joy —*Plenus gratiae et veritatis:* all grace and all truth are in him. A spiritual man should never for one moment forget this; he should always remember it, and examine himself interiorly every now and then to discover in what state he finds himself with regard to God. And those whom God has withdrawn from a wicked and deceitful world, those who have no cares, who have not to think of house and children, ought especially and necessarily to reflect on what they can do to please God, and to live for him alone. It is difficult to counsel in this way those who have to bear the burdens of this world, for no one can enter a mill without becoming covered with flour, nor into a fire without being burnt. However, I have come across souls who, in the midst of a multitude of business affairs, lived in such purity and perfection as to make those who are given up to a spiritual life blush.

"This lovely image of our Lord must be understood in a noble, divine, and reasonable manner, and not sensually, as if he were merely a creature, as some people do. When these people think of God they think of him as of a creature, as a man whom they love, who has done good to them, who has suffered for them, and they therefore feel a natural pity and compassion for him. No, this should not be. The man who represents to himself Jesus Christ should think of him as the Son of God, as the Man-God, as the God-Man, and not imagine him as a creature, but as wholly divine and supernatural, so that he never think of the lovely image of Christ save as God. In thinking of

him in this way and representing him thus, one can never be without God, and where God is nothing will be wanting. And thus we are never deprived of that which is best. . . ."

262. "But we have said that man should free himself from all images. Should we therefore free ourselves from the admirable image of our Lord? Certainly not; that would be a dangerous thing to do. If we go to him and listen to his words we shall hear him say: 'It is expedient for you that I go, for if I go not the Paraclete will not come to you, but if I go I will send him to you' (John xvi). Would these words signify that he forbade us to preserve his image? He only forbids it to be retained in a material and sensual manner, as his disciples would have done. He did not wish it to be kept by them in this way, but they never ceased to preserve it in a divine and supernatural sense, for when he deprived them of his bodily presence, all their senses, all their affection, and their whole souls remained attached to him. We also should endeavour to act in the same way. He has gone back to heaven. He is in the bosom of the Father. There he is life, essence, a brilliant mirror of light, and the image of the face of the Father; and not only is he the image, but he is one with the Father in an essential manner and in perfect equality. We also should ascend with our senses, our love, and our intentions to the heart of the Father, and make our minds and our love tend to this mystery, and thus we should be united to him and become like unto him. Then we should live and dwell in the three Persons, and should be able to say with St Paul: *Conversatio nostra in coelis est:* Our conversation is in heaven (Phil. iii, 20); that is to say, in the three Persons, in the Divinity. To this end every desire, all the senses, all the powers of a man should tend. If he should not succeed in attaining it during life, God will bestow it upon him after death. If he does not obtain it at once, if he have still some faults to expiate, he will have to go to Purgatory, where he will be purified. And when he finally reaches heaven he will enjoy, more or less, according to the fervour of his love and of his desires, the vision of God. This is why a man should extend as much as he can the circle of his desires, in order to acquire at every moment as much merit as possible. . . . Inasmuch as he has not obtained a high degree of perfection, he ought to labour with all his might, and if he cannot arrive at it he should at least desire it with all his heart. May God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost graciously grant that we may all arrive at it. Amen." (*Serm. II*).

(4) *Union with God.*

263. "The prophet David, that noble and meek mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, being immersed one day in divine contemplation, cried out: 'It is good for me to adhere to God.' O my little children, my heart cries now with a loud voice what I have so often said when I was with you: It is good, it is well, it is the most excellent and desirable of all things to live for the infinite Good alone, to dwell in him, to be united to him at every moment by loving aspirations, forgetful of every grief and trouble; for then the soul is absorbed into the only One, and flows back into that ocean of all Good from which it came, and, as St Paul says: 'He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit' (1 Cor. vi, 17). The bright reflection of eternal Light, the clear mirror of the divine Majesty, the beautiful image of the divine goodness, at the Last Supper which he took with his beloved disciples, prayed to his Father, saying: 'Holy Father, keep them in thy name, whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we also are."[1] And those who have become one with him in this unity see their hearts and minds renewed by an inflowing of the same Spirit in a new truth, in hidden light, in extraordinary sweetness, in freedom from all dissimilarity, in a true vision of divine light. All their senses are so recollected, and their understanding so absorbed in the contemplation of the naked truth that there is no flower on earth so beautifully adorned by nature as their hearts and minds are supernaturally by grace and virtue in him who is the sublime Principle of all good. . . ." (Letter XII, ed. Thiriot; XV, ed. Preger).

(5) *The interior exercises that the fervent soul should practise.*

264. "One day someone inquired if a man could manage to do without all exterior exercises, or whether exterior exercises were to be preferred, or else if it would be better to remain quiet both exteriorly and interiorly in contemplation. The answer he received to this question was this: 'It is not meet that beginners, who still crawl like snails, and, like them, are confined by their defects in their shells, should try to emulate eagles and to hover in the air; they ought rather to enter into themselves and to discover to what they are attached, for he who tries to fly

[1] (John xvii, 11) The text is *Ut sint unum, sicut et nos.* Suso does not quote it exactly.

with a heavy burden on his back will experience many disasters.' This is why, if a man desires to arrive at perfection, he ought to separate from all creatures and to subjugate his body by mortification; he ought to mortify himself by the curtailment of sleep, of food, and of other things, especially of things that he finds particularly agreeable, for his body is his worst enemy, and he carries it about with him, therefore he ought not to allow it to master him."

265. "Now I will propound three questions. The first is, What is the highest kind of knowledge? The second, What is there that is best in life? The third, What is the best of interior exercises? To these questions I will reply briefly. To the first: To contemplate God without intermediary. To the second: To have a will united to the will of God in prosperity and adversity, in joy and in sadness. To the third: To turn to God at each instant, and to be united to him.

"But as to knowing if a man can attain to a state in which he need no longer require any interior exercise, know that it sometimes happens that a man, either by contemplation or by interior joy, may possess entire liberty. . . . He may attain to union with the supreme Truth, and this union will suffice him; he can think of nothing further. When men are not as yet entirely dead to themselves, when they have not stifled all seeking after temporal things, they find impediments in their way and are not a little kept back, as the breaking off is not complete. This is why it seems to me necessary that they should, at whatever perfection they may have arrived, make the four following exercises; and if they do not neglect them I believe they will come as near as is possible to the highest perfection. The first exercise consists of recollection in simple silence; the second of remaining always in interior solitude; the third of endeavouring exteriorly to imitate the example of Jesus Christ in its greatest perfection, in humility, in entire obedience, in a peaceful poverty, and like the eternal Father, who loves himself in himself, to love oneself and all creatures for his sake alone. The fourth exercise consists in this: that each time the natural likings return to the surface, we renounce them at once and for ever, without considering the reward. To become best among the best it is necessary to work and to humble oneself below all men, as if one were dead" (Letter XIII, Thiriot edition; XVI, Preger edition).

CHAPTER VII

MYSTICAL DOCTRINE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

1. *St Vincent Ferrer.*

266. It was at the beginning of the fifteenth century that St Vincent Ferrer, one of the greatest wonder-workers and preachers who have ever appeared in the Church, accomplished his marvellous mission. Born in 1357, he died in 1419. This great saint has left several writings, the most notable of which is his treatise *On the Spiritual Life*. This work was the favourite reading of St Vincent de Paul. "It has been for a long time the handbook of pious souls," says Charles Sainte-Foi, "and it was the book principally recommended by the masters of the spiritual life to those who desired to make progress in perfection. At one time it enjoyed the same kind of reputation that the *Imitation of Christ* and the *Spiritual Combat* have in our days."

267. The means indicated by St Vincent Ferrer for attaining perfection are:

Firstly, Poverty. "That the servant of Jesus Christ should despise all earthly things and look upon them as dung, and only take what will barely suffice for his wants."

Secondly, Silence. He would have him "abstain from all useless or frivolous talk."

Thirdly, Purity of heart. "After having by voluntary poverty and silence done away with the innumerable cares which prevent the development of the seeds of virtue which are continually being sown in the field of our hearts by divine inspiration, it remains for you to apply yourselves by a more strenuous labour to obtain those virtues which lead to purity of heart, that purity by which, according to the words of our Lord, *Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt* (Matt. viii), your eyes will be opened to divine contemplation, which will establish such peace and rest in your souls that he *whose dwelling is in peace* will deign also to dwell in you.

"Do not imagine that I am here speaking only of that purity which preserves us from evil thoughts. I speak rather of that chastity and purity of heart which keeps far from us all useless thoughts, so much so that, as much as

is possible in this life, we no longer take any pleasure except in thoughts of God, or of things which relate to God."

"But to obtain this heavenly, or rather this divine, purity, since he who adheres to God is 'one spirit' with him, many things are necessary" (ch. iii).

These things, necessary to those who wish to acquire purity of heart, are the destruction of self-will by an entire mortification and a cheerful acceptance of every trial, and the extinction of self-love by the practice of humility.

268. Humility, in fact, succeeds in purifying the human heart of all superfluous thoughts, and in this way procures the light of contemplation and the holy fervour of perfect charity.

"Man, driven back on his own lowliness, in despising himself, in taking himself sharply to task, in detesting himself, in considering his nothingness, in being profoundly displeasing to himself, is so well occupied with the affairs of his soul that all useless thoughts disappear little by little, all temporal thoughts, words, and actions are driven far from him, are cast into a profound oblivion, and he begins to turn back on himself, to enter into himself, and thus draws near to original justice, not to say to heavenly purity. In turning back on himself, the horizon of his soul broadens, he rises as if ascending a mysterious ladder to contemplate the angels and the Divinity, and by this contemplation the mind is inflamed with the desire of heavenly blessings, and only regards earthly things from a distance as if they were nothing. Charity then begins to burn in the soul. Like a fire, it consumes the rust of faults, and perfect love takes possession of the heart and closes every avenue to vanity. All its thoughts, words, and actions are dictated only by charity.

"Whoever is in this happy state can assuredly preach to others without fear of vainglory, for, be it said again, vanity cannot obtain footing in a heart entirely filled by charity."

269. Such is, according to St Vincent Ferrer, the road leading to perfection. He remarks: "I have sketched briefly and abridged an account of those things necessary to him who desires to become perfect; if he wishes to work to some purpose, and to procure without difficulty the salvation of souls." This is the traditional doctrine, and the saintly writer has well accomplished the task he set himself when he said at the beginning of his work: "I will only put into this treatise the salutary teaching taken from the writings of the holy doctors."

2. *Gerson.*

270. The authors hitherto cited were as remarkable for their heroic virtues as for a profound knowledge of the ways of spiritual life. In spite of the great merit of him whose mystical doctrine I am about to set forth, I abstain from placing him in the first rank, or from attributing to him an equal authority. In a church where for many years I have exercised the sacred ministry there is a stained-glass window in which three persons are represented—St Francis de Sales, St Teresa, and between these two great saints, occupying apparently, the place of honour, Gerson. Such an assortment has always astonished and shocked me, and many others have found the same fault as myself. I do not desire to incur the same reproaches as the glass-painter has drawn down on himself by giving such an honourable rank to the celebrated Chancellor of the University of Paris. Therefore, if I make known here his doctrine on mystical theology, it is less on account of the authority which can be personally attributed to him than to throw more light on the spirituality of this period,[1] of which the works of Gerson present a learned and faithful epitome. We will begin with his treatise on *Mystical Theology*.

(1) "*Mystical Theology*" (*doctrinal part*).

271. Mystical theology proceeds by negation; all authors are agreed on this point. And yet in mystical theology there is a positive element. In what does it consist? Those who have no experience of it understand it with difficulty. It is difficult to explain it to them, in the same way as it is difficult to make a blind man understand colours, or to explain the principles of harmony to the deaf (Consider. 2).

In order, therefore, to convey some idea of it, we will show, first, in what part of the soul the phenomena, which belong to the domain of mystical theology, take place.

Three means of knowledge are to be distinguished in the soul—the senses, reason, and pure understanding—to which correspond three affective faculties—the sensitive appetite, the will or reasonable appetite, the synderesis, which is the highest part, the apex of the appetitive part[2] (Cons. 9).

[1] Gerson was born in 1363, and died in 1429. Fr. Faber calls Gerson the St Thomas of modern spirituality (*Growth in Holiness*, ch. xvii). This is exaggerated praise, but it shows what a high position Gerson holds among spiritual writers.

[2] I have explained this doctrine more at length in *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, l. III, ch. i, § 2, and l. V, ch. iv, and in *The Mystical State*, ch. xiii.

Everyone can understand what the two first faculties are—the senses and reason; pure understanding[1] is that faculty by which we gain knowledge of first principles, thanks to a light given us by God, an intuitive knowledge without reasoning. The first principles are truths seized, but that require no demonstration, such as that the whole is greater than its part, understanding is a perfection, etc. (Cons. 10).

The synderesis is the affective faculty which, thanks to an instinctive attraction placed in us by God, seeks the good which is perceived by the pure intelligence[2] (Cons. 14).

Contemplation resides in the pure understanding, and mystical theology in the synderesis; contemplation, indeed, does not reason; it sees, it gazes, and to this easy and free perception of simple faith corresponds a similar attraction in the affective part of the soul; that is to say, free, but sudden, requiring neither reasoning nor effort (Cons. 21).

272. There are men in the world utterly devoid of lofty principles, who live like the brutes and obey only the cravings of the senses. Others follow the light of reason; but there are others, again, who rise above reason and enter a region of light and peace, exempt from the troubles and agitations which are produced by an almost infinite number of empty thoughts and cares.

The first have only fugitive thoughts, the second meditate, the third contemplate (Cons. 26).

Passing thoughts produce nothing but unstable desires; meditation produces either devotion or contrition; but contemplation produces charity; not ordinary charity, but that charity which is usually called ecstatic; that is to say, a charity which carries the soul into sublime regions and casts her into the divine, a charity which produces acts with the greatest ease, and obtains a peace and a profound happiness truly inestimable and above all sensible joy.

This is what Holy Scripture calls the hidden and mysterious wisdom of God—*Sapientia Dei in mysterio abscondita;* the acts it engenders are transports, loving and sublime outbursts, *supermentales excessus;* and the contemplation which does not produce this love does not deserve the name of contemplation (Cons. 27).

[1] Gerson sometimes says pure understanding, sometimes simple understanding.

[2] The greater number of theologians understand by synderesis not the higher part of the appetitive faculty, but what they name *habitus principiorum practicorum,* which resides in the understanding and gives us a knowledge of practical principles, such as : We must do good and avoid evil.

273. Mystical theology, then, is the act of the soul which, inflamed with loving desires, rushes towards God;[1] or, again, it is the impulse of a pure and burning love raising the soul towards God; it is an experimental knowledge of God obtained in the embraces of unitive love (Cons. 28).

By mystical theology the soul forsakes itself, is raised above itself. A similar phenomenon to that which takes place in contemplation and mystical theology may be occasionally observed in purely sensible affections, whether of men or animals. Sometimes, in fact, the desire excited by the sight of a coveted object is so intense that the subject of it cannot contain himself, but becomes beside himself, and would pour himself out and be entirely lost in the object of his passion.

In the same way, when the understanding is entirely illuminated by the undisturbed contemplation of heavenly things, the soul can, it is true, remain calm and completely self-possessed, but sometimes the love which consumes it is so fierce that it can no longer contain itself; love carries it out of itself in transports of joy. In the same way, when the rays of the sun are concentrated by a concave glass they will set tow on fire, and soon a flame appears and rises towards the sky (Cons. 29).

274. Mystical theology as distinguished from speculative theology, which acts like the other sciences, from reasoning, is acquired by love, by the generous exercise of moral virtues which purify the soul, of theological virtues which enlighten it, and of beatific[2] virtues which render it perfect. Great learning is not necessary for this. If we admit, as faith teaches, that God is all goodness and greatly to be desired, there is nothing to prevent the soul that is purified, enlightened, and well disposed from taking flight towards him with all the strength of love, without being under the necessity of reading learned books for that purpose. Therefore, mystical theology, which imparts the most perfect knowledge of God that can be had here on earth, may be possessed by all the faithful, even by the most humble and ignorant of women (Cons. 30).

It must be recognized also that there are learned men, and even theologians, to whom it is not expedient to speak about mystical theology, although one can do so to the

[1] *Extensio animi ad Deum per amoris desiderium,* a definition borrowed from *Mystical Theology,* a work for a long time attributed to St Bonaventure (*cf.* above, No. 234).

[2] Theologians have given this name to virtues practised in perfection, because they render those who possess them happy. These virtues belong either to the elect in heaven or to perfect souls on earth.

faithful who are simple and illiterate if they have courageously practised mortification and humility, for then God takes his delight in them. Why should this mystical theology be hidden from them when it is all love, and when love makes it so desirable? Those to whom it is inexpedient to speak of it are learned men full of self-conceit and given to empty disputations, who have no taste for the things of God[1] (Cons. 31).

275. Mystical theology unites us firmly with God; it carries us far from the tempestuous sea of sensual desires to the peaceful shore where dwells the Eternal. In order to reach this shore it is necessary that Jesus should have produced peace in our souls, and that we should be rescued from the fluctuations of worldly desires and natural reasonings (Cons. 34).

No science can establish the soul thus in God; this stability can only be acquired by love; it is love alone that can make us say: *Mihi adhaerere Deo bonum est:* It is good for me to adhere to God (Ps. lxii, 28).

276. Love has three properties: it entrances, unites, and satisfies (Cons. 35).

It entrances and causes rapture. Rapture, as it is here understood, takes place when one power, being raised above those which are of a lower order, is so entirely engrossed in its action that the other powers either cease to act, or else have a very limited action; then the inferior powers, being, as it were, bound and suppressed, can no longer interrupt the operations of the superior power.

As to ecstasy, this is a still more perfect rapture which takes place in the highest part of the soul—in that part which we have called the pure understanding. This is so intent on its action that the inferior powers—reason, imagination, the senses, and often even the faculties of nutrition and motion—are incapable of action. Therefore, ecstasy checks the operations of the inferior powers more effectually than rapture; it has its seat in the intelligence only, while rapture can take effect on the different powers (Cons. 36).

Thus the imagination will be enraptured if the object represented to it excites in the soul such ardent feelings of desire or of love that the senses no longer act; then those objects that are present can no longer be perceived, no sound can be heard, and nothing that is passing near at hand can be remarked (Cons. 37).

[1] It is curious to compare what Gerson says here with that which was written at the same period by the author of the *Imitation* on the error of those learned men who value knowledge more than devotion (*Imit.* l. I, chs. ii and iii).

The reasoning faculties can be in a state of rapture; that is to say, so entirely occupied with its investigations and arguments that the imagination and the senses are as if suspended. This is sometimes the case with certain scientists whom one sees completely absorbed in their theories, their senses being closed to all else (Cons. 38).

In the same way the soul can receive in the higher part such vivid light that the whole attention will be fixed upon it, and that the other powers will become incapable of producing their ordinary operations (Cons. 39).

277. The second property of love, as mentioned before, is to unite those who love each other in a steadfast and lasting union. Aristotle said, "My friend is another self," and this union is effected by a community of tastes and of will. When our souls are united to God by deep love they form but one spirit with him because of a perfect conformity of will (Cons. 40).

The loving union of the soul with God which is accomplished by mystical theology has been very justly called *transformation* by St Dionysius and other holy authors. Love, like heat, does, in fact, draw together and amalgamate elements capable of union, while it separates those of irreconcilable nature. All that is spiritual and divine in man is separated and extricated by mystical theology from all that is earthly and corporeal, and the division of the spiritual from the animal nature is thus effected; that is to say, of the spiritual tendencies from the sensual inclinations. And as God is a pure spirit, the human spirit, thus purified, is united to the divine Spirit and becomes like unto God (Cons. 41).

This loving union in which mystical theology consists procures rest, satisfaction, and steadfastness to the soul. Every being enjoys peace from the moment it has obtained that which completes and perfects it; therefore, how could souls united to God, the true and only source of perfection, fail to enjoy this peace, contentment, and stability (Cons. 42)?

278. All the properties which we have attributed to mystical theology belong equally to perfect prayer. Love, mystical theology, and perfect prayer are one and the same, or at least are indissolubly united. Mystical theology, being, as we have said, an experimental knowledge of God obtained by a loving union with him, according to the words of the Apostle, *he who is joined to God is one spirit*, this union is effected by ecstatic love,[1] as St Dionysius teaches. Again, this mystical theology is

[1] Which causes the soul to forget herself, to go out of herself.

wisdom—that is to say, a science relished, a science acquired in the enjoyment of God—and St Dionysius calls this wisdom irrational, insensate, because it surpasses reason and has its seat not in the intellect, but in the most lofty part of the soul, which is the affective; love itself, as St Gregory explains, becomes knowledge.

Such is mystical theology, as we have said. But what is perfect prayer but this experimental and affective science? Prayer is defined to be the raising of the heart and mind to God with piety and humility. Thus perfect prayer raises the soul above the mind and above reason by the fervour of its desires and love. And in what does this love consist? It is not a love that can be felt, nor that can be reasoned about; it is the highest form of love of which the soul is capable. It is of this kind of love that Blessed Antony and the other Fathers have praised for its excellence. "Perfect prayer," they have said, "does not consist in the sound of words, nor in the composition of sentences; it consists in such loving and pure desires that often he who prays neither knows nor thinks any more of what he is asking." The soul, in fact, does not reason any more, but by a very simple act of charity is brought near to the supreme and only Good, wherein it dwells and takes its rest, according to the words of the Psalmist: "In peace I will sleep and take my rest" (Ps. iv, 9).

Mystical theology, perfect prayer, have their place, therefore, in the highest part of the affective power, and have for object God, the principal and supreme Good; they either suppose, accompany, or produce that pure love, the properties of which we have explained (Cons. 43).

(2) "*Mystical Theology*" (*practical part*).

279. To know in what mystical theology consists, in what part of the soul it is exercised—these are theoretical questions not sufficient for the faithful, nor, above all, for the clergy; it is necessary to proceed to the practice of it, and to understand what are the means to take and the obstacles to avoid in order to obtain it. But before all we must remember that only our Lord can impart the science of mystical theology and of perfect prayer; human effort does not suffice, although it is not to be neglected. We shall soon see that the soul by its own efforts is incapable of obtaining mystical theology. Nevertheless, efforts have to be made, as is shown by the principle so well expressed by St Paul: "We are God's auxiliaries" (*Prolog.*).

280. How can anyone know that he ought to give himself to contemplation?

First, by a call of God. It is not everyone who is capable of contemplation; beginners still look upon God with fear; the proficient look only at the reward; it is only the perfect who behold in God a Father, a beloved Spouse, to whose embraces they aspire (Industria I).

281. Attention must also be paid to temperament. St Gregory, who was so well versed in these questions, states that he has met people of a nature so distracted and agitated that contemplation would be unsuited to them, or that it would be very difficult for them to apply themselves to it.[1] It is necessary also to consider the character of each person in order to decide upon the way which would lead him to contemplation most certainly; some arrive at it more quickly by the remembrance of their past sins and by the sorrow they feel for them; others by the attraction of the truth; and others, again, by the consideration of the sufferings of our Lord, or by the thought of the benefits they have received from God and of his love for them (Ind. 2).

282. The profession and kind of occupation must also be taken into account; there are those who by the duties of their state are thrown into such a vortex of business affairs, into such perpetual motion and such a multitude of preoccupations, that for them contemplation is simply impossible. And yet even they, if contemplation has become familiar to them, may, like the angels of God, give themselves to action without prejudice to contemplation, and apply themselves to contemplation without neglecting action. It ought to be so with all those who are in a state which presupposes perfection, and especially with ecclesiastics, who are obliged by their vocation to tend to this perfect disposition (Ind. 3).

Would it be reprehensible for them not to aspire to contemplation? Certainly it would, not only for ecclesiastics and religious, but also for those in the world who have sufficient time at their disposal, and are capable of it, and have been instructed. All these should cultivate the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and then they will find little difficulty in making their hearts overflow with holy fervour (Ind. 4).

283. To obtain this contemplation it is necessary to avoid too many occupations, so as to have sufficient leisure. As we have said, only those who are perfect and who already possess this gift can combine the two and unite activity with the enjoyment of wisdom.

Is the singing of the Office in choir an obstacle for

[1] See above, No. 213, the doctrine of St Gregory and St Thomas.

religious souls to contemplation? I would like the persons interested to answer this question themselves. Possibly these long vocal prayers were arranged so that those who were but little advanced and incapable of doing better might be piously occupied; there may be many such, for those who are truly spiritual are only too rare.[1] However, the favour of contemplation depends on grace more than on human industry. This is why even in the midst of songs and psalms the really spiritual feel fervent and enjoy holy transports. Happy are they who are so disposed, those who unite burning affections with the recitation of holy words: they fulfil the duty of divine praise, and at the same time enjoy the favours bestowed upon those who, in solitude, practise contemplation (Ind. 5).

284. In the second place, one must avoid curiosity. By curiosity we mean inquiry into useless things, and also into things useful in themselves, but to which one gets more attached than is suitable. Above all, let no one seek contemplation out of ostentation; on the contrary, one ought to draw from it occasion for humbling oneself all the more, seeing how mean and vile we are in the sight of the God we contemplate.

Besides, why pride ourselves on it? God can grant these spiritual graces to souls who are not worthy,[2] and can refuse them to his friends, either to keep them humble, or to punish them for minor faults, or to show that he grants this gift to whomsoever he pleases, or else for some reason known only to himself; for who can fathom the abyss of his judgements? (Ind. 6).

285. He who aspires to mystical theology should exercise great perseverance in his efforts. To what cares, work, and night watches is one not subjected in order to become proficient in any art or science? No labour is considered too heavy to escape poverty, increase fortune,

[1] Psalmody is a help even to contemplative souls, for they cannot give themselves to silent contemplation without intermission, and therefore what better could they do than recite the sacred words? They not only find, in the alternation of vocal prayer and silent contemplation, rest and necessary variety, but they also derive from the divine office new light and holy thoughts. And, further, do they not owe to God the homage of their voices as well as that of their hearts?

[2] Gerson goes so far as to say to unworthy souls. We must not forget, however, that, as our author says and frequently repeats, mystical theology and perfect prayer consist essentially in love. At this place Gerson seems to have forgotten this fundamental principle, and to be contradicting himself. A sinful soul may, without doubt, either under the influence of the evil one or of an excitable nature, experience something like transports of love, soaring of the heart, or remain in a state of suspension similar in appearance to contemplation; but these are fallacious appearances, and not real mystical theology.

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or acquire an empty title to fame; in a word, for silly and transient advantages. Is it not, then, shameful to employ less ardour and constancy on an art so beautiful, so great, so divine? (Ind. 7)

286. The affections and inclinations of the heart must be guarded. Mystical theology is seated in the affective faculties, and in this differs from other sciences, which reside in the understanding. It can rightly be called the art of loving, or the science of love. If, therefore, the source of the affections be corrupt, if the heart be allowed any earthly attachment, the passions will be aroused, and this will become an obstacle to divine love (Ind. 8).

287. Those who desire to obtain contemplation must also take other means, such as to choose the most suitable time and place (Ind. 9), to make only a moderate use of food and sleep (Ind. 10), to dwell with insistence on reflections calculated to produce feelings of love in the soul (Ind. 11).

288. There are still the representations of the imagination to drive away. This last expedient arises from what has been already explained concerning the essential nature of mystical theology. It is the supreme love which raises the soul above self and which is produced by the intuitive light of pure intelligence; clouds of sensible phantoms have no entry to this summit of the soul; to acquire the highest and most ineffable ideas of God it is necessary to rise yet higher, according to the doctrine of St Dionysius, and to plunge by love into that divine obscurity in which they can be obtained. But to attain this summit of perfection the two lower degrees must be passed—first the purgative, then the illuminative—to obtain light. One must become accustomed to behold in God, not a severe inflexible judge, but a Spouse most desirable, full of sweetness and kindness, who deserves our love even when he deprives us of life. We should desire his holy embraces, his chaste kisses, which fill the soul with a peace above all imagination, and say: "My beloved to me, and I to him" (Ind. 12).

(3) *"The Mount of Contemplation."*

289. Gerson wrote this treatise in French for his unmarried sisters living in the world, whom he wished to teach how to please God by always serving him and worthily loving and honouring him. The contemplation that he recommends to them is, he says, that which leads to the love of God, which makes his inexpressible goodness appreciated; it is a contemplation which does not

require deep study, but which can be acquired by simple souls who are free from the cares of the world and retain their purity of heart. It is that kind taught by St Dionysius in his mystical works, and is the greatest wisdom that is possible to be acquired in this world.

The doctrine of the author is similar to that of his mystical theology.

We will sum up that part of it which is most practical—that in which he indicates by what obstacles the greater number of Christians are prevented climbing this mountain of contemplation, and the reflections or considerations which would help them to do so.

290. Here, then, according to Gerson, are the obstacles to contemplation (ch. xxxv and xxxvi):

Firstly, the want of perseverance. Stopping on the way makes it necessary to begin afresh. Secondly, the want of method; wishing to arrive at the summit at once without passing through the preliminary degrees, without beginning with the consideration of sins and faults. Thirdly, worldly preoccupations. Fourthly, the uncontrolled wanderings of the imagination. The buzzing of these flies takes off the attention, and they are pursued in the way that children run after butterflies. Fifthly, excessive fear of temptations; instead of letting these infernal dogs bark and going on one's way, one torments oneself and encourages them. Sixthly, a want of humility in all its forms; presumption and blind self-confidence, the desire to be raised above others by contemplation, etc; nothing is more displeasing to God, nothing prevents his grace more than such culpable pride. Seventhly, the way in which the body is treated, either reducing its strength by excessive austerities, or allowing it too much indulgence. Eighthly, the immoderate love of pious reading. Ninthly, a horror of suffering. Tenthly, a want of effort or of intention to continue the efforts, etc.

291. Of what meditations is it well to make use in order to arrive at contemplation? (ch. xxxvii).

Richard of St Victor has given a method for this which seems more suitable to the learned than to the simple. St Augustine gives another when he relates his conversation with his mother at the window overlooking a garden a little while before her death. St Gregory has said so much about contemplation, its progress, and the dangers to be found in it, yet has not been able to point out the way to it. St Jerome advises Eustochium to think of her death and triumphant entrance into Heaven. All the doctors agree in saying that one must meditate on the

pains of hell, the joys of paradise, the hideousness of sin, and the vanity of the world. St Bernard, in his *Sermons on the Canticles*, makes reflections on the marriage of God with the soul. He mentions that he himself made constant use of meditation on the life of our Lord in order to arrive at contemplation. The author of the book *The Goad of Love* (*De Stimulo Amoris*), which treats principally of the Passion of Jesus Christ, proves that he who would follow any other way would be deceived or wander far from contemplation. There are those who make use of books of devotion or of lives of saints, but this will be insufficient unless they are able to dispense with these books. Others endeavour to arrive at contemplation by following the services of the Church, which seems to me even more difficult on account of the sound of the chants (*propter laborem cantui annexum*), unless, indeed, they have already become accustomed in solitude to contemplation.

292. Gerson (ch. xxxix) recommends the practice of considering oneself as a beggar, and of petitioning alms from the saints and from God. He speaks of a person who made use of this method, and said that at first she experienced many distractions, but having persevered courageously for many days, although sometimes two, three, or four hours passed before she obtained calmness of thought and perfect recollection, yet by this perseverance she at last succeeded nearly always, and thus she experienced the truth of our Lord's promise: "Knock and it shall be opened."

Gerson ends his book by saying that there is a contemplation above that which he has described—that union with God enjoyed by St Paul; but about this he disclaims any intention of speaking.

3. *St Laurence Justinian.*

293. St Laurence Justinian, who was born at Venice in 1381, and died in 1455, was the first Patriarch of that city. "He wrote," says the Roman Breviary, "works full of piety and a heavenly doctrine." The few extracts we take from his writings will show his mind about the perfect soul.

The following is taken from his book on *The Solitary Life* (ch. i):

"'Who will give me the wings of a dove?' cries the Psalmist, burning with the desire of contemplation, 'that I may fly away and be at peace.' These are the words of a soul filled with love, and longing for the peace that love bestows.

"The inspired author understood that earthly possessions cannot give peace, that only harmful troubles, innumerable cares, insatiable desires, and bitter griefs can be found in them. Then the soul turns to God, the unchanging Good, the eternal, supreme Good, the universal source and sole principle of all good. This Good has only to be known to be desired, and this desire produces joy, and joy contentment, contentment happiness, and happiness peace. . . .

"To attain to this it is necessary that man in this life should apply himself to interior practices and to the contemplation of heavenly things; in this way his knowledge of holy truths and his love of the divine beauty will increase. Also by the help of these two spiritual wings—knowledge and love—he will fly away until he arrives at the repose in which God is enjoyed, and thereafter he can never be surfeited with him. . . .

"This desire for God and knowledge of heavenly things act with greater power on the heart of a man who has more light and more easily moved emotions. They render him fervent in seeking, eager to taste, ardent in loving, attentive in contemplating. He desires, in seeking to find the divine Object of his attraction, in desiring to obtain him, and in loving, to grow and to rise; in rising, to arrive at repose, and when he has found his rest, overwhelmed with joy, he cries: 'This is my rest for ever and for ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen it' (Ps. cxxxi, 14). This grace which he has obtained he hopes never to lose and never to see lessen.

"But so that no mistake can be made about one's own condition, we will give the signs which will prove with certainty that true contemplation and divine graces are found in this interior repose. Those who have true contemplation are prudent in conduct, impose a strict guard on their minds, know how to collect their thoughts, always have a pure intention in their acts, apply themselves to spiritual matters, desire the presence of God, love him with a love full of humility, enjoy intercourse with him above all things, seek heavenly graces with avidity, and enjoy a profound peace. If this be the case, one is not far from the kingdom of God; indeed, one possesses it within oneself, according to the words of Holy Scripture: 'The kingdom of God is within you.'"

294. In his book *The Tree of Life* (ch. vii, Of the Degrees of Prayer) St Laurence Justinian speaks thus of contemplation:

"Contemplation is that sort of prayer in which the soul

is carried away by strong desires, with all the more fervour the more pure it is, and it is the more pure the more it abstains from carnal desires and earthly inclinations to devote itself to spiritual things.

"It is to this contemplation that we ought to tend without ceasing, for it is the true means of our becoming united to God."

Of the degrees of contemplation which is the aim of prayer (ch. x).

"It is the custom of travellers, and truly a custom worthy of praise, not to stop on the way, but to continue their journey to the end. True soldiers never leave the field of battle until victory is complete. In everything, in all matters, the end must be considered. An uncompleted enterprise, instead of meriting praise, brings blame on the author of it. It is the same with agriculture, with building, with studies, and human science; also, and with far greater reason, in the cultivation of virtue. Whosoever does not persevere runs in vain.

"May those, therefore, who desire union with God, and who, by prayer and the practice of virtue, have become one spirit with him, allow themselves no rest, so that their ardent desires may have no diminution, and that their wishes may be fulfilled. And in order that they may not be mistaken in thinking that they have attained the summit of prayer when they are only on the way, I think an explanation of the different degrees leading to the act of contemplation will be useful in this last chapter, for contemplation is the end and aim of prayer."

The holy author then gives the method taught by Richard of St Victor for leading the soul to divine contemplation.

4. "*The Imitation of Christ.*"

295. Among the illustrious doctors of the fifteenth century I could also cite Denis the Carthusian,[1] whose doctrine is the same as that of the other masters.[2] But I hasten to quote from the *Imitation of Christ*.[3]

The author of this admirable work follows the same path as the great masters who preceded him. With them he considers perfection to be a union of love in which the

[1] Denis the Carthusian was born in 1409 at Rihel, in the diocese of Liège. He joined the Carthusians of Ruremonde in 1423, and died in 1478.

[2] See *De laude vitae solitariae*, art. 4, 6, 36; *De vita inclusarum*, ch. xiv; *De contemplatione*.

[3] See the book of Fr. Dumas: *Introduction à l'union intime avec Dieu*, in which the doctrine of the *Imitation* is set forth in a very interesting and practical way.

soul which has first been purified, pacified, strengthened, and enlightened, is raised above itself, and in the fervour of contemplation rushes towards God and finds rest in him.

296. "Unless I put myself in this disposition . . . I cannot arrive at inward peace and strength, nor be spiritually enlightened, nor fully united to thee" (Book III, ch. xli, 2). This union, in which the grace of a delightful familiarity is enjoyed, he calls a joyful union (*unio fruitiva*) (Book III, ch. xxxvii, 4). "Unspeakable indeed is the sweetness of thy contemplation which thou bestowest on those that love thee" (Book III, ch. x, 1). "Cleanse, cherish, enlighten, and enliven my spirit with its powers that it may be absorbed in thee with ecstasies of joy" (*jubilosis excessibus*) (Book III, ch. xxxiv, 3).

We often find the word "excessus" repeated in the *Imitation*. It is a word familiar to authors of the Middle Ages, and it indicates, as we have said, the soaring of the soul forgetful of self, detached from self, rising above all creation, and carried towards God by the very strength of love.

"This," continues the pious author, "is the disposition of really holy souls for, being raised above themselves, and drawn out of themselves, they are wholly absorbed in the love of me, in whom also they rest by an eternal enjoyment" (Book III, ch. lviii, 5).

He employs the same terms, in speaking of unitive and contemplative acts, as the other great masters: *Contemplari, speculari, uniri, inhaerere, Deo,* or *contemplationi, supertransire creaturam, se deserere, extra se tendere, super se elevari, quiescere, vacare et videre quoniam suavis est Dominus, sapere divina.* It is the same doctrine expressed in similar terms.

297. "Love," he says, "resembles a bright flame or a burning torch. It mounts towards the sky in like manner and clears a passage for itself through every obstacle. It is a loud cry reaching the ear of God, this ardent affection of a soul saying to him: My God, my love, thou art all mine, and I am all thine. Enlarge my heart with love so that I may learn to taste in its depths how sweet it is to love thee, to be dissolved and drowned in thy love. May I be possessed by thy love and raised above myself by transports of fervour and admiration.

"Let me sing the canticle of love, let me follow thee on high, my beloved, let my soul lose herself in thy praises, rejoicing exceedingly in thy love" (Book III, ch. v, 6).

298. The pious author indicates the obstacles that are to be avoided in order to arrive at perfect love.

"But because there are few that labour to die perfectly to themselves, and that fully tend beyond themselves, therefore do they remain entangled in themselves, nor can they be elevated in spirit above themselves" (Book III, ch. liii, 3). And it is "our vices and sins, in which we lie entangled in such a manner as seldom to be able to contemplate heavenly things" (Book I, ch. xxi, 4).

299. What must we do, then, to obtain this burning love, this happy and salutary union?

"If thou desirest to have peace and true union, thou must set all the rest aside and turn thy eyes upon thyself alone. Thou wilt then make great progress if thou keep thyself from all temporal care. But if thou set a value upon anything temporal thou wilt fail exceedingly" (Book II, ch. v, 2 and 3).

"Thou must be naked and carry a pure heart to God if thou wilt attend at leisure and see how sweet is the Lord. And, indeed, thou wilt never attain to this, unless thou be prevented, and drawn in by his grace, that so thou mayest all alone be united to him alone, having cast out and dismissed all others" (Book II, ch. viii, 5).

300. All human consolation is to be renounced if we aspire to the consolations of divine love.

"When a man has come to this, that he seeks his comfort from nothing created, then he begins perfectly to relish God" (Book I, ch. xxv, 10).

"If thou reject exterior comfort, thou wilt be able to contemplate heavenly things, and frequently to feel excessive joy interiorly" (Book II, ch. i, 8).

301. It is, then, by perfect detachment that one arrives at contemplation, divine joys, and true union.

"What was the reason that some of the saints were so perfect and contemplative? It was because they made it their study wholly to mortify in themselves all earthly desires; and thus they were enabled with the whole interior of their hearts to cleave to God. . . . If we were perfectly dead to ourselves and no ways entangled in our interior, then might we be able to relish things divine, and experience something of heavenly contemplation. The whole and greatest obstacle is because we are not free from passions and lusts, nor do we strive to walk in the perfect way of the saints" (Book I, ch. xi, 2 and 3).

"A lover of Jesus and of truth, and a true internal man that is free from inordinate affections, can freely turn himself to God, and in spirit elevate himself above himself, and rest in enjoyment" (Book II, ch. i, 6).

"Some there are that resign themselves, but it is with

some exception, for they do not trust wholly to God, and therefore are busy to provide for themselves. Some, also, at the first offer all, but afterwards, being assaulted by temptation, return again to what they left, and therefore they make no progress in virtue. These shall not attain to the true liberty of a pure heart, nor to the grace of a delightful familiarity with me, unless they first entirely resign themselves and offer themselves up a daily sacrifice to me; for without this divine union neither is nor will be obtained" (see above, No. 296).

302. But it is, above all, in the thirty-first chapter that the author's doctrine on contemplative union can be found.

He begins by declaring that to attain it requires a grace of a higher order.

"Lord, I stand much in need of a grace yet greater if I must arrive so far that it may not be in the power of any man, nor anything created to hinder me. For as long as anything holds me I cannot freely fly to thee. He was desirous to fly freely to thee who said: 'Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest' (Ps. liv). What can be more at rest than the simple eye that aims at nothing but God? And what can be more free than he that desires nothing upon earth? A man ought, therefore, to pass and ascend above everything created and perfectly to forsake himself, and in ecstasy of mind to stand and see that thou, the Maker of all things, hast no similitude with thy creatures.

"And unless a man be at liberty from all things created he cannot attend to things divine. And this is the reason why there are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that wholly sequester themselves from transitory and created things.

"For this a great grace is required which may elevate the soul and carry her up above herself. And unless a man be elevated in spirit, and set at liberty from all creatures, and wholly united to God, whatever he knows, and whatever he has, is of no great weight.

"Many are found to desire contemplation, but care not to practise those things which are required thereunto. It is a great impediment that we stand in signs and sensible things, and have but little of perfect mortification."

303. But this contemplation, precious and desirable as it is, cannot last long. Other duties and also the necessities of life oblige us to interrupt it. And further, it has alternations of sweetness and trials, of fervent longings, and of distractions. The pious author points out at

different times these vicissitudes, so painful to contemplative souls.

"Son, thou mayest not always continue in the most fervent desire of virtues, nor stand in the highest degree of contemplation, but it must needs be that thou sometimes descend to lower things by reason of original corruption, and that thou bear the burden of this corruptible life, even against thy will, and with irksomeness.

"As long as thou carriest about with thee thy mortal body thou shalt feel trouble and heaviness of heart.

"Thou oughtest, therefore, as long as thou art in the flesh, oftentimes to bewail the burden of the flesh, for that thou canst not without intermission be employed in spiritual exercises and divine contemplation.

"At these times it is expedient for thee to fly to humble and exterior works, and to recreate thyself in good actions, to look for my coming and heavenly visitation, to bear with patience thy banishment and the aridity of thy mind, till thou be visited again by me and delivered from all anguish" (Book III, ch. li, 1).

"Neither is it an illusion that sometimes thou art rapt into an ecstasy, and presently returnest to the accustomed fooleries of thy heart. For these thou rather sufferest against thy will than procurest; and as long as thou art displeased with them and resistest them, it is merit and not loss" (Book III, ch. vi, 9).

"I never found anyone so religious and devout as not to have sometimes a subtraction of grace or feel a diminution of fervour.

"No saint was ever so highly rapt and illuminated as not to be tempted at first or at last. For he is not worthy of the high contemplation of God, who has not, for God's sake, been exercised with some tribulation" (Book II, ch. ix, 7).

304. And yet true contemplatives can be very admirable. The author proves this by the Fathers of the desert, of whom he draws an enthusiastic picture (Book I, ch. xviii). We will only quote a few passages.

"They laboured all the day, and passed a good part of the night in prayer, though even whilst they were at work they ceased not from mental prayer.

"They spent all their time profitably; every hour seemed short which they spent with God; and through the great sweetness of divine contemplation they forgot even the necessity of their bodily refreshment."

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1. *Louis of Blois.*

305. This is one of the masters of the spiritual life, and the reader has, doubtless, often seen him quoted; but few in our days are acquainted with his life and works.

Louis of Blois (Blosius) was born in 1506, in the country of Liège; he was brought up in the court of Charles the Fifth. This he quitted when quite young, at the age of fourteen, to enter the Benedictine Abbey of Liessies, in Belgium. Having become Abbot at the age of twenty-four, he succeeded in reforming not only this abbey, which had become much relaxed, but also other monasteries in Belgium, in which he had the satisfaction of seeing revive anew the spirit and virtues of the first sons of St Benedict. Such success in such an enterprise speaks well for his merit, and dispenses with the necessity of entering into further details on the sanctity of his life; for is it not a well-known axiom that the task of a reformer requires as many natural and supernatural qualities as that of a founder? This saintly man died in 1565, aged 59 years.

306. His principal work is the *Institutio Spiritualis*, or *Book of Spiritual Instruction* (1551), the object of which is to point out the way to perfection.

"Every man ought, according to right reason, to aim with ardour the most earnest[1] after this end," says Louis of Blois—"namely, that by attaining to a perfect life he may be intimately united to God himself in this exile. From that moment would man be unable to wander forth in seach of spurious delight derived from created things, for all to him would be insipid and bitter, which was not God. . . .

"Those, indeed, who are united to God without any medium, and allow him freely to work in them, are the most dear friends of God, and in one little hour are of

[1] Translation of the Abbé Godin, Besançon, 1844. The original was republished in 1895: Blosius, *Manuale vitae spiritualis*, Marietti, Turin. English trans. by Fr. B. A. Wilberforce, O.P., London, new ed., 1925.

more advantage to the Church than others who have not attained to this union can be in many years. . . .

"Whoever aspires to this state, and desires to become perfect, and to experience the close embrace of divine union, must strenuously persevere in self-denial and mortification of himself; he must, moreover, diligently cultivate the habit of holy 'introversion' or recollection, and must ardently aspire to God by prayers of ejaculation and by holy desires. He must, moreover, take care that all he does or leaves undone should be done or left undone for God's sake, looking in all things to him and seeking to please him only. In this way and in no other can a man come to perfection and to mystical union with God" (ch. i).

307. Louis of Blois then speaks more at length of those virtues, the practice of which leads to divine union. He enlarges on the subject of mortification and entire self-renunciation; and then passes on to interior recollection, and ends that which he teaches on this subject as follows:

"In this way ought he to free himself from all inordinate anxiety, from all vain thoughts, from all imaginations—that is, from forms and likenesses of lower things; and from all entanglement and distraction. In this way should he endeavour to preserve his memory like a bridal-chamber, clean and neat for the Spouse. For thus he will very much please God, and, at last, the images of created things falling of their own accord from his mind, true interior recollection will be given him.

"He must by no means abandon his study of perfection, and his endeavour to attain it, on account of any natural unsuitableness of his character, or on account of the weariness to which he may at first be subject. For those who are learning some art are accustomed many times to do their work unskilfully and imperfectly, till at last by long practise they acquire complete skill, and can do their work with ease. Some, when they see that though they have now laboured one or two years, and yet have not obtained what they sought, become discouraged, and give up their design. But they act not aright. For they who desire some time or other to arrive at the goal of perfection, must arm themselves with long-suffering perseverance" (ch. iii, *sub fine*).

308. Then the author treats of the aspirations and loving outpourings of the soul, and continues to expound his doctrine thus:

"The diligent darting forth of aspirations and prayers of ejaculation and fervent desires to God, joined with true mortification and self-denial, is the most certain as

well as the shortest way by which a soul can easily and quickly come to perfection; that is, to the wisdom of mystical theology. For aspirations of this kind efficaciously penetrate and surmount all things which are between God and the soul. Indeed, as often as anyone withdraws himself from all perishable things and turns his heart wholly to God with humility and love, so often does God meet him and pour new grace into his soul."

309. "Truly we should feel much compassion for those who, given to things of sense, and content with external exercises only, neglect all their life to enter into the secret sanctuary of their own soul, and there to cultivate the blessed union they might have with God. For whilst they care little for true mortification of themselves, and consume their life and strength in things not principally necessary, they make little or no progress in spirit, and always stick in the same mire. If they would not exactly like to say the words, yet, in reality, in their hearts and by their actions they do say: 'Let him who desires unite himself to God, but that is a thing we do not concern ourselves with, for it is not in our line.' But yet, even ignorant and uneducated people can attain to the very highest wisdom of mystical theology and union. For in this matter no unusual powers of mind are required, but purity and humility of heart, liberty and detachment of mind, with fervent love, are the only qualities necessary.

"External exercises are good and pleasing to our Lord; I mean such things as to sing the praises of God, to say many vocal prayers, to genuflect, to worship God with sensible devotion, to fast, to watch, and suchlike things; but the internal exercise by which the soul stretches forth with ardent desire towards God in order to be united to him, not, indeed, by sensible images, but in a certain supernatural way is incomparably better and superior. They who adhere to external exercises only, with some self-love, and according to their own judgement, and do not endeavour to mortify themselves and to join themselves in spirit to God, will, without doubt, after a life spent in such imperfection, have to pay in Purgatory a penalty grievous in proportion to the degree in which they sought themselves. The merciful God does not reject such souls, but desiring to work in them, he waits to see if, perchance, he may find them fit for his divine operations and free from impediments. He leaves them to their own exercises and ideas, for he never forces anyone. But his desire is to lead all to the knowledge of himself, and to unite them to himself, if only they would remove the

obstacles that stand in the way. It grieves his divine spirit to see us content with the lowest things when he is ready to bestow on us the highest, for he desires to give himself to us in the most excellent way" (ch. v).

310. Louis of Blois recommends us to rise to the consideration of the divine essence, and to give the remembrance and thought of the humanity of our Lord a place in our minds, as a necessary means for the foundation of the contemplative life. We believe that no one has better explained this very important point of mystical doctrine than this author.

"The spiritual servant of God should always have the lovely life and Passion of the Lord Jesus concealed, as the most precious of all pearls, in the casket of his heart. But, as before said, he must not regard Christ himself purely as man, but as God and man; for so he will not in his contemplation be without God. Whenever he finds it difficult to occupy himself with higher meditation, he should willingly go back to the lowly manhood of our Lord, exercising himself in the remembrance of those things which he did and endured for us. But he will do well to avoid too violent an effort of imagination lest the head should be injured. He should put before his eyes a cross or crucifix, the compendium of the life and passion of Christ. In the most sweet wounds of the same most merciful Jesus should he dwell and take his rest. Whilst he refreshes his body with food and drink, he should endeavour to dip each morsel, by devout affection, into the most pure blood of Jesus and drink each draught from his ruby wounds. No one at all can humbly read or think of the passion of our Lord, although he should do so without much sensible affection, without reaping from this exercise fruit most useful for salvation; just as no one could touch flour or balm, even with the tips of his fingers, without having his fingers whitened with flour and perfumed with the odour of balm. Even if the image of Jesus crucified be only piously glanced at, the look will not have been in vain.

"Therefore should the servant of God impress the beautiful image of the crucified manhood of Christ on the powers of his soul and the senses of his body, and betake himself entirely to it. For this will, after a time, in a wonderful way lift him up into the supersessential and formless image, to the eternal Word and wisdom of the Father, into the most high godhead of Christ. The manhood of the most sweet Jesus is the safe way, the very door itself by which to arrive at his

Godhead. In vain will the servant of God aspire to mystical and genuine contemplation, if he will not humbly exercise himself in meditation on the Passion of our Lord. For unless he has that as his foundation, the higher he tries to rise by contemplation the lower will he fall, and the more disastrous will be his fall. In truth, even if he should be so flooded with the light of grace as sometimes to be carried out of himself and absorbed into the riches of God, and thus happily to lose himself in the light of grace, still, when he returns to himself, it will be most suitable for him to recall the interior eyes of his heart to Jesus crucified, always holding fast to this as the foundation of love. It will be expedient for him sometimes to dwell on the thought of the incomprehensible Godhead, at others on the most noble manhood of Christ, and to ascend and descend from the one to the other. By this means, 'like a tree planted by the running water' (Ps. i, 3), he will experience a wonderful flow of the river of heavenly grace. So will he also happily go in and go out and will find pastures most sweet, both in the manhood and in the Godhead of the Lord Jesus. This, indeed, is the most exalted of all internal exercises, when, abstracted from all things, we willingly embrace God only in the inner sanctuary of the soul, which is free from all images of sensible things, and hide ourselves in the manhood of Christ, and become conformed to him" (ch. vi).

2. *St Teresa* (1515-1582).

311. In all that applies to prayer, St Teresa is an authority of the first rank. It cannot be doubted that she was appointed by God to teach this holy exercise by the love and practice of which souls may arrive at union with him. A statement of her whole doctrine is necessary here; it will show how closely it follows that of the great masters before her time, as well as elucidating and completing their teaching on many points.

St Teresa was acquainted with the works of her illustrious predecessors; she had, as she herself makes known to us, read the works of St Gregory, Cassian, St Peter of Alcantara,[1] and certain authors of her own time who had treated of questions of high spirituality. To this knowledge, which she acquired by reading, was joined a practical personal experience and knowledge of the direction

[1] St Peter of Alcantara teaches the traditional doctrine also in his *Treatise on Prayer and Meditation.*

of souls. She acknowledges having received from God great help towards expressing her ideas with clearness, and she manifestly possessed a mission to make prayer loved and to excite souls to seek perfection.

It can be said that in the theory of prayer is summed up the whole of her doctrine.

(1) *The three methods of prayer.*

312. To understand this subject better we must divide the numerous methods of prayer that she describes into three classes: (1) Ordinary prayer; (2) those prayers that she calls supernatural, the usual endowment of perfect souls, and for this reason called ordinary supernatural prayer; (3) lastly, extraordinary or ecstatic prayer.

Ordinary prayer consists in meditation and affective prayer; she distinctly names the first, and describes the second without actually calling it by this name (*Life*, ch. xi, xii; *Way of Perfection*, xix; *Castle, Fourth Mansion*, ch. ii).

Ordinary supernatural prayer the saint designates under different titles; contemplation, prayer of quiet, divine attractions, slumber of the powers.[1]

These prayers are supernatural according to St Teresa, when they cannot be acquired by our own industry, however much we may endeavour to obtain them. All that we can do is to dispose ourselves to receive them, and this is a great and necessary point (*Letter to Fr. Rodr. Alvarez*, February, 1576).

If one is about to meditate, one chooses a subject, examines it, fathoms it, and draws conclusions from it, and thus one succeeds by one's own efforts in performing this holy exercise. In supernatural prayer it is not at all the same; one can, and ought, to dispose oneself, but one cannot procure it; the soul makes certain efforts at recollection, and then the grace of contemplation will come, not according to the amount of effort made, nor acquired by reasonings, but poured forth directly by God. In the same way, if one required some water, it could be drawn from a well by the strength of the arms, and the quantity would be proportioned to the effort made (this is a figure of meditation). But if one possesses a

[1] In this ordinary supernatural prayer the soul, without ever having had ecstasy or visions, can arrive at the summit of the spiritual life, the transforming union, for the transforming union is effected by the gifts of the Holy Ghost carried to their utmost development, and these gifts can produce all their fruit without the soul experiencing rapture or being favoured with divine apparitions.

water-wheel and sets it in motion the water will come easily and abundantly, out of all proportion to the strength applied.[1]

Anyone, by reason of great purity and the fervour of his love, can reach a height where every time he prepares himself, his disposition will be so perfect that God will hardly ever refuse him light, and then his contemplation will have become habitual. At the same time it remains true that it comes from God, and that he does not attain it at his own pleasure as in meditation.

As regards prayer of the third class, ecstasies, raptures, etc., these are not at one's own disposal; they are unforseen and absolutely gratuitous.

In ordinary supernatural prayer the powers are not lost; to employ the expression of St Teresa, *no se pierden* (*Life*, xiv): the soul, therefore, retains consciousness and the use of the senses. The light received is doubtless very valuable, and produces an intense love, and in certain cases such fervour that the soul is in a state of holy intoxication (sleep of the powers, or perfect contemplation). However, even in this case "the soul is sufficiently conscious to realize that it is on this earth, and to feel its solitude; it can make use of the exterior senses to explain, at least by signs, what it is experiencing" (*Life*, ch. xviii, p. 130 of the Burgos edition).

On the other hand, in prayer of the last category, "there is no longer any use of the senses; one does nothing but enjoy without understanding that which one enjoys. . . . All the senses are so much occupied with this happiness that none of them, either exterior or interior, can be occupied with anything else" (*ibid.*). "It is not only that the senses are no longer awake, but it is as if they were lost" (*Letter to Fr. Rodr. Alvarez*).

From the time that the senses are lost, there is ecstasy. St Teresa, who has in many places (*Life*, ch. xviii; *Castle, Fifth Mansion; Letter to Fr. R. Alvarez*) given the name of the 'prayer of union' to this kind of prayer, recognizes

[1] If we pay particular attention to this comparison, we shall understand that, according to St Teresa, the distinction between mystical prayer, which she calls supernatural, and discursive prayer proceeds from a different mode of the operation of grace, procuring light and love in meditation, according to the efforts of the faithful soul, and placing it directly in a state of contemplation. *The saint always laid down this principle to distinguish them, and never gave any other.* She does so very clearly and in two places: in the *Way of Perfection* (ch. xix, Burgos ed., t. iii, p. 91, and ch. xxv, p. 117 and 118); French translation of the Carmelites (pp. 151 and 188), and again in her last work concerning the satisfaction of affective prayer and the enjoyment of contemplative prayer (*Fourth Mansion*, ch. 1).

that "it can also be called with truth, ecstasy. Ecstasy (that is to say, the prayer for which she reserves this title) differs from union in this only: it lasts longer, and makes itself more felt exteriorly" (*Rel.*, v, p. 33).

(2) *Desire of ordinary contemplation.*

313. The prayers of the last category—(ecstatic) union, ecstasy, flight of the spirit—should not be desired; they are extraordinary favours, outside the common way, and the soul can be raised to sanctity without them. Speaking of the less elevated state, that of the prayer of union, which is but a lesser form of ecstasy, St Teresa declares (*Fifth Mansion*, ch. iii, p. 87) that this union was not that which she desired. The union she had desired during her whole life was that of conformity with the will of God[1]—that is to say, the sincere and constant tendency of the soul which wills only what God wills. This can be obtained without the reception of *such* supernatural favours as the suspension of the powers.[2] One can easily enter the fifth mansion without (ecstatic) union, because the real union, which is that of conformity, can be obtained by perfect detachment.

Simple contemplation, on the contrary, being a gift usually granted by God to truly faithful souls, and a most powerful means of advancing in his love, ought to be the object at which the Christian should aim.

314. It is necessary to make this teaching of St Teresa conspicuous, because it has been too frequently passed over in silence, and even misrepresented.

In the *Way of Perfection* there is a text which has sometimes been misused; separated from the texts which explain and complete it, it might mislead those who misunderstand it as to the true meaning of this great saint, and lead to the falsifying of her doctrine.

The daughters of St Teresa wished her to teach them the way to arrive at perfection (*Way*, ch. xvi), and the saint, agreeing to their request with a good grace, wanted, however, to give them some necessary advice. Among her daughters there were some who were not favoured with this sort of prayer, and were inclined to

[1] The saint repeats this declaration, *Foundations*, ch. v.

[2] *No parezca que quedan sin esperanza a los quel el Señor no da cosas tan sobrenaturales.* Bouix, in his translation, has left out the word "TAN," "to whom God does not accord these supernatural graces." This translation might lead to the belief that, according to St Teresa, the union of conformity could be attained without any supernatural grace—that is to say, mystical grace; following the Spanish text, she would assuredly mean to say without ecstatic union.

murmur and to be jealous of their more privileged sisters, being afflicted beyond measure about their own state. The saint many times advised them to cease troubling and to be humbly content with the share given them by God; she showed them that if they made of this trouble occasion to humble themselves they would be gainers thereby, for humility, mortification, and detachment are the surest means of arriving at perfection. "It may be," said the saint, "that the one who is least in her own estimation is the highest in the sight of God. Although all the religious of this convent exercise themselves in prayer it does not follow that they must all be contemplatives; that is not possible."[1]

"One can be saved without contemplation; and since God does not exact this as a condition for an eternal recompense, no religious should try to persuade herself that it is exacted of her in this house. Without being contemplative, she will still become very perfect if she acquit herself faithfully of that which I have mentioned; she can even surpass the others in merit, because she will depend more on her own exertions, and because God is treating here as a strong soul, reserving for her (in heaven) all those consolations of which she has been deprived on earth" (*Way*, xvii, p. 80).

The saint showed further to these troubled souls how the part of Martha, who was a saint, and merited to receive our Lord at her table many times, was not to be despised. "Had she always been plunged, like Magdalen, in loving contemplation, there would have been no one to prepare the repast for the divine guest" (p. 81).

These arguments, however, must not be too much pressed, because it may be objected that Martha at other times later might have given herself up to loving contemplation, and thus have increased in sanctity. At that time the Apostles themselves were not great contemplatives, but were, none the less, great saints, and became contemplatives later; and doubtless it was the same with Martha. But the principle inculcated by St Teresa is very just; let us do what God requires of us, and content ourselves humbly with that which he bestows on us.

315. This remark, too, should be made: St Teresa never says that perfection can be attained without mystical favours of any sort, either consoling or arid. Most certainly many perfect souls are in a state of dry contemplation; they are not absorbed, like Magdalen, in silent

[1] However, as will be seen, the saint, some years later, testified that nearly all the Carmelites of the Reform were raised to contemplation.

and rapturous contemplation. *St Teresa only speaks here of sweet contemplation;* it is from the sweetness of prayer that she tries to detach those souls that appear desirous of contemplation for the sake of the consolations derived therefrom. Speaking of someone who could only pray vocally, she says, "There are many others like that, but, provided that they are humble, I believe that they will also find that they have profited[1] as much as those who have received consolations in prayer. . . . Those who never receive such consolations pursue their way in humility, always fearing that it is their own fault, and continually trying to improve" (p. 81).

Further on (ch. xvii, p. 85) the saint repeats the great principle that it is humility which is a certain sign of spiritual progress, and not the *delights* of prayer, such as raptures, visions, and other favours of the same nature which are given to souls when God pleases.

Humility, therefore, is of greater importance than the delights of contemplation. But how can *perfect* humility be obtained? The considerations of meditation, declares St Teresa, are powerless to produce it; the Lord himself must give light to make the soul see its own misery and nothingness, and this light is the mystical light received in contemplation. "Our Lord himself inspires humility, and in an entirely different way to that which would result from our poor little considerations (*consideracioncillas*). Indeed, what comparison could there be between our reflections and that true humility, accompanied by the light by which God teaches the soul and makes it realize its nothingness?" (*Life*, xv, p. 114).

St Teresa makes the same assertion about perfect detachment (*Way*, xix, 8, p. 91; cf. *Life*, ch. xxxi, p. 258), showing that we cannot acquire contempt for the world by our own considerations, but if God should favour us with mystical union we should then learn more in an instant than by years of meditation. . . . Whatever we achieve in meditation, there is always an admixture of imperfection in our operations; it is not, as in contemplation, the living water drawn from its actual source; it is water running through earth and consequently charged with mud (*Way*, ch. xix, p. 90).

316. Therefore, according to St Teresa, contemplation ought not to be desired on account of the pleasure it

[1] All the more that, as the Saint remarks in another place (ch. xxx, *sub fine*), giving as an example a person who could pray only vocally—perhaps the same one—contemplation may well be joined to these vocal prayers.

procures, but what is to be desired are the light and the love that the soul receives by it, and the virtues that it communicates—humility, detachment, etc. This is why, while the saint consoles those of her daughters who are not contemplatives, she, at the same time, urges on them the necessity of humility, and encourages them in their desire for contemplation, and in expecting with confidence to receive it from the divine goodness.

"Do I mean by this that you should not behave in such a way as to merit to enjoy all these favours? God forbid! . . . Be assured that if we do all that depends upon us, if we prepare ourselves perfectly for contemplation, either he will give it—*and I am persuaded that he will not withhold it if we are truly detached, and are really humble* —or he will reserve these sweet delights for us in heaven" (ch. xvii, p. 81, 82). She had already said before, "The soul (not contemplative) must not lose courage. . . . Our Lord sometimes waits a long while before visiting a soul, and then he gives at one stroke, and in one visit, that which he has given to others during many years" (p. 80).

Elsewhere, comparing contemplation to water from the spring, which refreshes, purifies, and quenches thirst, she expresses the wish that her daughters should be upheld in the practice of virtue by the hope of drawing the water from that salutary source.

"My daughters, do you know why I have shown you the palm of victory before the fight has begun? Why I have raised the veil to show you the happiness of the soul which drinks deeply of this fountain of living water? It is because I do not wish you to become disheartened by the sufferings and opposition you will meet with on the way, and to give you courage never to give in to fatigue. . . .

"Consider that our Lord invites us all. He is truth itself, and we must never doubt of the truth of his words. If this banquet were not general he would not have called us all, and even if he had called us to it, he would not have said, 'I will give you to drink,' but rather, 'Come, all of you, you will lose nothing by serving me, but as to this heavenly water I will give it to whomsoever I please'; but since he has not made this restriction, either in his invitation or in his promise, I hold for certain that those who do not halt on the way will at last drink of this living water" (ch. xix, p. 94).

317. At this point the saint, remembering what she had said before (see above, No. 314), which might appear con-

trary to her last words, felt it necessary to explain her meaning more clearly, and she did so by softening down her first assertion without diminishing in any way the second which she reaffirmed with additional energy.

"It may seem that there is some contradiction between what I am now saying in this last chapter and that which I said formerly, when, *in order to console those who could not attain contemplation*, I stated that there were many roads to lead to God, as well as many mansions in heaven. Well, I am going to repeat it. Our Lord, with that intimate knowledge which he has of our weakness, has contrived to give us help according to our different requirements. But the divine Master has not ordered some to go by one path and others to go by a different one. In the excess of his mercy he will prevent no one from drinking at the fountain of life" (ch. xx, p. 95).

Nevertheless, God treats weak souls differently, but he does not reject them. There are, in the house of our heavenly Father, many mansions, different according to merit, therefore there will be one for them. However, God will treat them generously in order to make them become stronger, for he never excludes anyone from the road which leads to contemplation.

After having explained the "Our Father," she says: "You see how this prayer contains in itself the whole spiritual life, from the beginning to that point where the soul is drawn into God, who gives it to drink abundantly at this fountain of living water which, as I have told you, *is to be found at the end of the road*" (ch. xliv, p. 205).

318. The saint never tires of pointing out to her daughters contemplation, as the aim of their efforts and hopes: "Follow always the way of prayer with an immovable resolution rather to die than to give up striving to attain the end" (ch. xx, p. 96).—"What should be the disposition of those who begin their journey (in the path of prayer), with a sincere desire to continue to the end—that is to say, until they quench their thirst at the spring of living water? First, and above all, they should have a *determined determination*[1] never to rest until they have arrived at the end, come what may, no matter what happens, or what complications may arise, or how people may complain" (ch. xxi, p. 99).

319. To these resolute souls the saint does not doubt that sooner or later the grace of contemplation will be accorded.

[1] We translate word for word in order to preserve the force and originality of the Saint's language.

If you firmly resolve to persevere at any cost in the practice of prayer, "fear not, my daughters, that our Lord will let you die of thirst (by refusing you the water of the fountain which gushes forth into eternal life); on the contrary he invites you to come and quench your thirst. I have already spoken to you of our Saviour's loving invitation, but I cannot too frequently remind you of it, so much do I desire to caution you against that discouragement into which those souls fall who do not know by experience the unspeakable goodness of God" (ch. xxiii, p. 111).

"Our Lord will never refuse you this supernatural prayer if instead of stopping on the way, you redouble your efforts to attain this end" (ch. xxv, p. 118).

Elsewhere, after urging her daughters to give themselves wholly to God, to have no other will but his, to practise perfect detachment, she teaches them that the more faithful they are to this rule the more mystical grace will they receive:

"The more we prove that our words and works are not mere compliments, the more closely will our Lord unite us to himself and raise our souls above all things here below and above ourselves, and render them capable of receiving great favours. He will not tire of rewarding us in this life for all that we have done in this way. . . . Not being satisfied with the intimate union by which we are made one with him, he begins to take his delight in our souls, to discover to them his secrets. He rejoices because the soul understands what it has gained" (ch. xxxiii, p. 155).

Ribera, who knew St Teresa so well, has written: "She *always* invited *everyone* to this supernatural prayer, and encouraged them, so that fortifying themselves with a firm resolution they might make every effort until they succeeded, even if they should die with fatigue; and she declared that if they did not tire or relax their efforts they would attain it."[1]

(3) *Preparation for contemplation.*

320. If we may not desire ecstatic prayer, it is clear that we ought not to do anything to obtain it; besides, such an attempt would be vain and presumptuous. This is the steady doctrine of St Teresa, and it cannot be gainsaid.

As regards ordinary supernatural prayer, the saint wishes us to prepare ourselves for it, to make every effort

[1] *A esta oracion sobrenatural convida* siempre a todos *y los anima a que con gran determinacion la procuren, hasta morir en la demanda, y dice que si no se cansan ni aflojan, la alcanzaron. Vida,* ch. viii, § 21.

to obtain it, yet only expecting it as a favour. For God, sooner or later, according to his good pleasure and the secret judgements of his wisdom, will grant it to those souls who are in the right dispositions.

321. God and man have each a part in the preparation for contemplation.

The part of man aided by grace consists above all in the practice of the virtues of confidence, detachment, humility, and fidelity to prayer.

St Teresa would have us arm ourselves with an invincible confidence. The portions of her writings already cited sufficiently establish this fact; other passages go to prove the importance she attaches to giving free course to the affections.

She desires that all constraint should be avoided, all interior discomfort, all that savours of scruple, that no importance must be attached to things of little consequence (*Way*, ch. xli; *Life*, ch. xiii). She is anxious that the vain terrors excited by the devil, or by means of others, to prevent souls beginning to enter the way of contemplation should be despised in order that this great blessing may be enjoyed. It is by these distresses that much harm is occasioned, for "a much greater number of souls would find God if they understood the infinite goodness that moves him to communicate himself so generously even in this life to poor sinners like ourselves. This thought will excite their desires, and I know that a number of people have been urged on by this consideration and have begun to give themselves to prayer and have received such great favours from God that in a very short time they have become real contemplatives" (*Way*, ch. xl, p. 193).

322. But the most efficacious preparation for contemplation is the practice of those virtues which detach the soul from itself: obedience, abnegation, and humility.

"If you wish me to teach you the way to contemplation," the saint says to her daughters, "you must permit me first to enlarge on subjects that are more important than you imagine." And she then recommends to them at great length those virtues without which they would vainly flatter themselves that they would become contemplatives (*Way*, ch. xvi, xvii, xviii).

She adds further (ch. xxxii, p. 154): "The divine Master makes use of these words, *Fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra*, because he knows what an immense advantage it is for us to accomplish faithfully the will of his Father. In this way our souls are prepared to arrive

in a very short time at the end of their journey, and to quench their thirst at last with the living waters of contemplation. But if we do not give up our will unreservedly to our Lord, so that he can dispose of it at his pleasure, he will never permit us to drink at this fountain."

In the *Fourth Mansion* (ch. ii, at the end), after having congratulated her daughters on their desire for contemplation, she says: "A soul should be humble and detached from all things, not only in imagination, because we are often deceived in this way, but in reality; and the divine Master will, I doubt not, give it not only this grace but also many others, surpassing its utmost desires."

323. These important virtues are not, however, sufficient unless they are accompanied by a great constancy to prayer.

She often persuades others to persevere in spite of every obstacle, and adduces her own example as having had to encounter a long and painful struggle with distractions, aridities, and all kinds of difficulties. The passages quoted above are sufficiently strong to require no further reinforcement.

Now, what kind of prayer is most suitable and most surely leads to contemplation?

Let us first remark that St Teresa, like the other mystical authorities, would have us apply ourselves to the knowledge of the divine greatness. Doubtless, "we should never, however high in contemplation, lose sight of our own nothingness, and, if we be greatly advanced we could not do so if we would; . . . but it is necessary, also, from time to time, that we should lose sight of our own misery to consider the grandeur and majesty of God. . . .

"To my mind we should grow much more in virtue by contemplating the divine perfections than by keeping the eyes of our souls so strongly fastened on our vile clay. . . . We should realize our own nothingness more clearly side by side with the divine magnificence, just as black shows more distinctly beside something white; moreover, our understanding and our will become ennobled and more capable of every kind of good if we look first at God and then at ourselves, making comparison between his greatness and our own nothingness. It is a great mistake to think only of ourselves and our miseries . . . this results in fear, pusillanimity, cowardice, and a thousand tormenting ideas" (*First Mansion*, ch. ii, p. 17, 18).

In the account of her *Life* (ch. xiii, p. 97), she relates that she "knew a person whose confessor kept her fettered to the knowledge of herself during eight years without

allowing her any liberty. Nevertheless, our Lord had already raised her to the prayer of quiet; the result to her was great suffering. . . . Understanding nothing of the spiritual life, such directors tire out the soul and the body and prevent all progress."

Another mistake which is, according to her, a stumbling-block in the way of contemplation for souls who are called to it is that "they are too much addicted to reciting a number of vocal prayers in a great hurry as if it were a task to get done" (*Way*, ch. xxxi, p. 149).

324. A method of prayer which she greatly recommends is that which she names "the prayer of recollection, by which gathering together all our powers we can enter into ourselves with God. There the divine Master instructs and prepares us in secret himself, more quickly by this means than by any other, to receive the grace of contemplation. In this inmost retreat, alone with our adorable Saviour, we can think of his Passion, adore him as present, and offer him to his Father without the slightest effort of mind, seeking him on Calvary, in the garden, or at the Pillar. Those who can thus shut themselves up in the little Cenacle of the soul, where he who created heaven and earth dwells, who accustom themselves not to look forth outside, but to pray in a place where there is nothing to distract their exterior senses, may believe that they are following an excellent path, and that it will not be long before they will be able to quench their thirst at the fountain of life" (*Way*, ch. xxviii, p. 130).

325. Another excellent method of prayer is "to reproduce Jesus Christ as present, and gradually to become inflamed with a tender love for his sacred humanity, to live in the society of this divine Master, to converse with him, to tell him of one's wants, to complain to him in trouble, and instead of becoming forgetful of him in joy, to rejoice then with him. . . . This is a sure way of profiting by the first degree of prayer (meditation) and of arriving in a short time at the second (contemplation)" (*Life*, ch. xii, p. 86).

326. These are the methods of prayer by which we can most surely arrive at contemplation. Must we do more?

Let us first note that St Teresa declares with reason that it would be contrary to humility, and would miss the mark, if we endeavoured of ourselves to gain contemplation. "Souls should not try to raise themselves if God does not raise them."[1] Doubtless after having "meditated for some

[1] *No se suban sin que Dios los suba* (ch. xvii, p. 87). Fr. Bouix, after having translated similar words at the beginning of the chapter in this

time, and considered, for example, the sufferings endured by our Saviour in the mystery of the flagellation; his motives in thus suffering; after pondering on the greatness of him who thus suffered, and on the love with which he bore these torments, it would be well to keep peacefully near to the divine Master without breaking silence. We should then try to impress upon ourselves the thought that he is beholding us, that he is with us, that we can speak to him, that we can tender our requests. Humbly at his feet we shall find happiness in his company, and recognize at the same time that we are unworthy to remain in his presence" (*Life*, xiii, *sub fine*). But to attempt more than this "would be mere folly." In mystical theology (that is to say in contemplation) "the understanding ceases to act," our souls remain dumb with admiration; entirely given up to our love, we cannot arrange our thoughts nor describe them without trouble; but this state is a divine favour and not due to our own efforts: if we attempt to attain it without the divine assistance we should only end in "coldness and stupidity,"[1] *bobos y frios* (ch. xii, pp. 87, 88).

May we not, however, aid grace and help in some measure to make contemplation easier? St Teresa recalls the teaching of the great masters, well known in her time, but which had been wrongly interpreted by certain contemporary authors on one important point.

"This," said she, "is what we read in certain books which treat of prayer. Contemplation being entirely supernatural and the work of God, we cannot by our own powers arrive at it. This is true, but when we have for several years been in the purgative way, and then made progress in the illuminative, we can help ourselves by freeing our thoughts from all creatures and raising them to the Creator; these authors strongly recommend driving away all representations of corporeal things to apply the mind only to the contemplation of the divinity." One must recognize all this as being in strict conformity with traditional doctrine, and St Teresa does not raise her voice against this teaching; but now comes an error which she denounces and combats most energetically. "They say," she adds, "that when one has become so far advanced, even the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ becomes an obstacle and a stumbling-block in the way of

sense, translates here: "Souls ought not to aspire to rise higher." This is by no means St Teresa's intention, and is, besides, contrary to her constant doctrine.

[1] The saint insists on this point again in the *Fourth Mansion.*

contemplation. In support of this assertion they allege that which our Lord said to the Apostles on the day of his Ascension,[1] when he announced to them that he would send his Holy Spirit." St Teresa very justly remarks that this was because the Apostles only saw in Jesus the humanity and not the divinity. "If the Apostles had had as firm a faith that our Lord was God and man as they possessed after the descent of the Holy Ghost, his presence would not, I believe, have been harmful to them. . . . According to these authors, one should try to think of oneself as surrounded on every side by God and as altogether lost in him. This seems to me all very well sometimes, but to leave Jesus Christ out entirely and to count the sacred body of the Man-God among our own miseries, to place him on a level with his creatures is what I will never endure" (*Life*, ch. xxii, p. 166).

327. We have shown the part that has to be taken by man in preparation for contemplation. What part is God's? It consists in aridities and trials of every kind, by which he purifies his creature and renders it able to receive the divine light. "Our Lord is pleased to send these troubles with many other temptations to some at the beginning"—and this is the most usual—"to others at the end. His design is, I think, to prove his lovers; before bestowing his great favours upon them, he would know whether they can drink his chalice, and carry his cross. I am convinced that it is for our good that our Lord conducts us in this way by which he shows us how little we are. The favours he has in reserve for us are of such great value that he wishes, before bestowing them upon us, to make us understand by experience all our misery, doubtless that we may not become like Lucifer" (*Life*, ch. xi, p. 80).

How ought we to act in the midst of these trials? No one has explained this better than St Teresa, and the whole of the eleventh chapter of her *Life* ought to be read. According to her we should resign ourselves. God wills that we should be in this state; therefore, we are pleasing God, and this ought to be enough for us; we ought even to rejoice and to regard it as a signal favour that we are allowed to pray in spite of the weakness we find in ourselves. Neither should we be troubled about bad thoughts. Was not St Jerome assailed by them in the

[1] Or rather the words *expedit vobis ut ego vadam* (John xvi, 7). "It is expedient to you that I go, for if I go not the Paraclete will not come to you." These words were spoken by our Saviour not on Ascension day, but on Holy Thursday (*cf.* above, No. 262).

desert? *If we cannot think of anything, perhaps even then, without our knowledge, our will is nourished with a substantial food and is given fresh vigour.*[1] God sees in our souls the wish they have to think always[2] of him and to love him always; this is all he desires of them, and he is satisfied with this disposition. True, these trials are hard, but even in this life God rewards them in a magnificent manner. "One single hour of the delightful sweetness which our Lord gave me to enjoy repaid me above measure for all the agonies I endured for such a long time in order to persevere in prayer."

(4) *Ordinary contemplation, the prayer of the perfect.*

328. Who are they who, according to St Teresa, practise these different methods of prayer?

Beginners practise the ordinary prayer (of meditation or of the affections).

Prayer of the second class is the ordinary prayer of perfect souls.

Prayer that is extraordinary or ecstatic is much more rare.

The first proposition is universally admitted, but not always the second; nevertheless, that also is not debatable. The passages cited up to now suffice to establish this fact, particularly those in which the saint promises contemplation to those souls earnestly applied to the acquisition of humility and detachment, for such are very near to perfection, and also to those of whom, should they possess these two virtues in full perfection, she declares that they must have received contemplative graces.

After having said that the prayer of quiet is a small spark of love that God himself casts into the soul, and which, although small, yet produces great effects, she adds, "If it be not stifled it will kindle *that great fire of love with which his divine Majesty inflames the souls of the perfect*" (*Life*, xv, p. 109). She had already spoken of those "joys and favours which *God bestows on those who are perfect*" (*ibid.*, viii, p. 57).

[1] The will is always strengthened in the loving union of aridity, St Teresa makes this remark elsewhere (*vide infra*, No. 330), saying that in this state the soul receives great graces without its knowledge. These graces do not proceed from consideration, since the soul can no longer make any: they are poured in by God, who acts directly on the will; it is a painful but sanctifying state (*vide, The Mystical State*, ch. xv, No. 175).

[2] This it is which characterizes the aridities of fervent souls and distinguishes them from those of souls more imperfect who do not experience this desire, this thirst for God,

If contemplation be sometimes given to the imperfect it is only "rarely so, and is not of long duration. . . . God reserves his favours very justly for those who give themselves to him without reserve; these are his favourite children. He cannot determine to keep them at a distance, and, in fact, he does not do so because they will not consent to remain for one instant out of his presence. He makes them sit at his table, and to them he serves the same food as that with which he nourishes himself" (*Way*, ch. xvi, p. 77).

St Teresa would never have used this language if, like certain modern authors, she believed that many perfect souls were not predestined to receive mystical graces.

Furthermore, speaking of one who could only make vocal prayer, *St Teresa said that inasmuch as this person was a perfect soul she ought to receive mystical graces.* "Most certainly it appeared that by her works she must have received these favours (contemplation and mystical union), for her life was very holy"[1] (*Way*, xxx, *sub fine*).

In fine, in her last work she assigns to the three first mansions those souls still far from perfect who practise meditation, and affective prayer with its sensible sweetness (*Fourth Mansion*, i, p. 48). In the fourth mansion these souls begin to enjoy mystical love. Then their virtue becomes stronger; they begin to value crosses, to bear them lovingly, to detach themselves from the world. "It is not enough, however, that God should bestow these favours once or twice, for souls to remain enriched with all these graces; they have to persevere in prayer in order to receive them continuously, *for it is this that constitutes all their happiness.*"

Therefore, it can be understood why contemplation as we have portrayed it is the end to which St Teresa would have the faithful constantly to tend, and her promise that every really faithful soul should obtain this grace, at least in a certain degree, can also be understood. This does not mean that all those who are truly detached will obtain contemplation in its highest degree. The saint asserts many times (*Life*, ch. xv; *Fourth Mansion*, ch. iii) that a very great number of persons attain the prayer of

[1] It has been attempted to prove (*Les Etudes*, 5 janvier, 1909), that St Teresa considered that mystical graces were not necessary for perfection because she had said she had known a great servant of God who could only pray vocally. According to the passage I have quoted, an exactly contrary conclusion is arrived at. If all be read, it will be seen that St Teresa regarded perfection as bound up with mystical graces.

quiet, but perfect contemplation in which all the powers participate is not so frequent.

It was, however, common enough amongst the Carmelites of the Reform in 1573, at the time when their saintly mother related the history of the foundations. "You would hardly find," said she, "in any house even one or two religious whom the divine Master has conducted by the way of ordinary meditation, all the rest being raised to perfect contemplation. Some, still more advanced, are favoured with raptures"[1] (*Foundations*, ch. iv, p. 34).

Fr. Bouix remarks that this passage "has been falsified in a manner as offensive as it is absurd in all the Spanish editions and in all the translations. The most spiritual saint of these last centuries has been made to say these singular words: 'The graces bestowed by God on these convents are so great that he conducts all the religious by the way of ordinary meditation, and even raises a few among them to a state of perfect contemplation.'"

Is it not here that we may seek an explanation of the error of respectable writers who say that, according to St Teresa, the number of souls guided in supernatural ways is very limited? The saint has always and everywhere taught the contrary.

That which, according to her, is much more rare, is extraordinary and ecstatic prayer.

She proved this by showing what took place in the different convents of the Reform, and reiterated it as impressively in the *Interior Castle* (*Fifth Mansion*, ch. i, p. 71). After having said that among her daughters there were very few who did not enter the fifth mansion, she recognizes that only a small number are accorded certain special favours, or rather, this special favour, for she only indicates one, the prayer of union, which, however, is but the first degree of ecstasy.

329. It only remains to give, following St Teresa, a description of contemplation, at least of ordinary contemplation, and of the rules to be followed.[2] But these points have already been treated at length in the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life;* it is sufficient to draw the reader's attention to that work.

[1] The Carmelites, in their new edition (Beauchesne, 1909), after a long and meticulous examination of the manuscript which had been tampered with by a foreign hand, translate as follows: "The Lord bestows his graces so lavishly upon the religious of these convents that if there be found a few actually conducted by God in the way of meditation, all the others arrive at perfect contemplation; many even are raised to a state of rapture."

[2] St Teresa gives no rules for ecstatic prayer, because there are, evidently, none to suit it.

There it will be seen that, following this subject, St Teresa shows that the state of contemplation does not always affect all the powers. While the will remains lovingly united to God, the imagination and understanding may be far away and produce painful trouble. It may even be that temptation mingles with the contemplation and makes its sting felt at the moment when the will redoubles its love.

330. Also this important point must be noted: Contemplation, which is rare at the outset,[1] becomes more frequent afterwards, but even with those souls most habitually contemplative, it is not continual; they have their times of apathy and powerlessness.

"I sometimes happen," said St Teresa (*Life*, ch. xxx, p. 246), "to find myself in a sort of stupid state. I act neither well nor badly. I go on following the others, feeling neither sorrow nor joy, callous alike about life or death, pleasure or suffering; in a word nothing moves me. To my thinking the soul then is like a little ass that continues grazing, and without feeling it, receives sustenance, and grows, thanks to the pasture it is given to feed upon. *In this state our souls will receive great graces from God*, since they remain uncomplainingly in such a miserable condition, and accept it with resignation; but it produces neither movements nor interior effects by which we could judge of our state. The idea occurs to me that the soul is then like one sailing before a gentle breeze, and making way without perceiving it. In the other states of which I have spoken, the effects of grace are so great that at once, on the contrary, the progress is in some measure immediately appreciable.

"As I have often repeated," she says elsewhere (*Life*, ch. xxxvii, p. 324), "our Lord wills that the soul be from time to time in darkness, deprived of his divine light. I have just passed eight days in this obscurity; I did not find in myself any feelings of obligation towards God, or remembrance of his graces; my mind was reduced to a kind of stupidity, and absorbed by I know not what. It was not that I had bad thoughts, but I found myself so incapable of good ones that I laughed at myself, and took pleasure in beholding the baseness of a soul in which God had suspended his operation. I saw indeed, however, that I was not abandoned by him, for it is nothing like those great interior sufferings that I sometimes experience; but in vain do I put on wood, and do what little is

[1] *Way*, ch. xvi; *Castle, Sixth Mansion*, ch. vii.

in my power; I cannot succeed in lighting the fire of divine love. As it is, it is a great mercy of God that the smoke appears and shows that the fire is not quite extinct. The Lord will light it again, but until he does so one may rack one's brain, and blow, and arrange the wood, but one only succeeds in putting it out completely. To my mind the best thing to do, then, is to give in with a good grace, to acknowledge frankly that of oneself one can do nothing, and to occupy oneself with other meritorious works."

3. *St John of the Cross.*

331. St John of the Cross (1542-1591) ought to come immediately after St Teresa. We know that these two great saints were united by the closest ties, and that under a different form they taught the same doctrine. Both were raised up by God to cause spiritual science to make important progress: their authority is equal, and the praise they have received from holy Church the same.[1]

St John of the Cross, although a less brilliant writer than St Teresa, is more didactic. It will suffice to follow him step by step, in order to condense his doctrine, without disarranging the order he has adopted.

(1) *The active night of the soul.*

332. As he himself declares,[2] he composed his work, the *Ascent of Carmel*—to which must be joined *The Dark Night*, which continues and completes it—to show how to arrive at the state of perfection, which is the union with and transformation of the soul into God by love and conformity of the will.[3] It is impossible to improve upon the way in which the subject is treated by him.

[1] *Multa caelestis sapientiae documenta conscripsit,* says the Breviary of St Teresa, and it says of St John of the Cross: *Libros de mystica theologia caelesti sapientia refertos conscripsit.*

[2] First lines of the *Ascent of Carmel,* p. 27. The references will always be indicated as in the *Edition critica,* published at Toledo, 1912-1914.

[3] The clear doctrine of St John of the Cross, showing in the mystical graces the means without which the soul cannot arrive at perfection, is extremely embarrassing to the partisans of that modern theory which sees in these graces simply privileges without any connection with perfection. They have asserted, without giving the slightest proof, that by perfection the saint designates, not perfection in general, but a *quite particular form of perfection.* Now, St John of the Cross has never written one word to authorize this distinction; he has never said that there are different forms of perfection each following its own path. And what other perfection can be imagined than that of which he speaks, and which consists, as he expressly declares (*Ascent,* I, 11, pp. 78, 79, et II, 4, p. 111, *Living Flame,* str. II, v. 6, p. 426), in the union of love and conformity of the will? Also he gives reasons why

Now, "a soul cannot usually arrive at a state of perfection without passing through two principal nights, which the masters of the spiritual life designate by the name of purgations or purifications. . . . We call them 'nights,'[1] because in both the soul travels, seemingly, in the middle of a dark night. The first night or purification is that of the sensitive part of the soul, the second night is that of the purification of the spiritual part."

It is evident that the soul has need of this double purification, as much in the spiritual as in the sensitive part; it has vicious inclinations, a tendency to seek pleasure away from God, and these are obstacles to union and to the state of perfection. The holy author calls the work of overcoming our natural inclinations the active night, and this is the subject of his first work, the *Ascent of Carmel*. As to the work of grace, which leads to the same end—that is to say, the whole number of trials through which God makes the faithful pass to complete the work of detachment, this is what St John of the Cross calls the passive night, and is the subject of his second work, *The Dark Night*.

All natural inclinations must be mortified and suppressed. We are not alluding to involuntary and unpremeditated inclinations. "It is not possible, as long as we are in this life, to destroy them entirely. . . . It can very well be that these involuntary appetites may continue in the inferior part of the soul, the superior part remaining entirely free from them. . . . But the soul should free itself from voluntary appetites which lead either to mortal or venial sin, or even to simple imperfections, in order to arrive at perfect union with God" (*Ascent*, I, 11, p. 78).

333. After expounding this doctrine of the universal mortification of the natural inclinations with a force that any attempt to analyze would but weaken, St John of the Cross goes on to teach those souls tending to perfection to walk in the path which he calls the dark way of faith, a doctrine he acknowledges to be somewhat difficult, but of great importance; for, "that done, the soul can be united to its Beloved by ties of simplicity, purity, and love, which will render it like unto him" (II, *Prol.*, p. 99). The following words of the holy author explain what he means by this dark way of faith: "He who aspires to union with God ought not to follow the path of reasonings, nor lean

meditation is incapable of producing this union of love; can it be said that these reasons are valid for some and not for others?

[1] Walter Hilton (†1395) had employed the term "night" in a similar sense (*Scale of Perfection*, ii, 5).

upon his tastes, sentiments, and imaginations; but make an act of faith in the perfections of the divine Being, who can be grasped neither by the understanding, the heart, nor the imagination, nor yet by any sentiment, for here, however sublime our feelings, knowledge, or tastes with regard to God, we must always be infinitely far from the reality of his Being and from the possession of his divine Essence. . . . Also, to arrive at the state of union, it is necessary to forsake self, and to leave all that is vile and base for that which is sublime in the highest degree" (II, 3, pp. 107-108).

(2) *Passive night of the sensitive faculties.*

334. However, the intervention of God is necessary to help the soul to thus forsake self; it could never succeed by personal efforts. How does God act? In what state does he place the soul that he wishes to lead to perfection? This is what we must know. St John of the Cross in this part of his work (*Ascent*, II, 5, p. 118) refers the reader to the book of *The Dark Night*, in which this question is elucidated.

In this book, *The Dark Night*, our author begins by declaring that it is not at the outset of the spiritual life that the purifying action of which he speaks is exercised.

Beginners meditate, that is the method of prayer suitable to them. Later, when they are ready for a more advanced method, God withdraws them from this inferior state and makes them enter that of contemplation; then is the very time, from the meditative to the contemplative state, when trials begin; for the change of state is a painful one, and this constitutes the ordeal of purification, and produces the state of divine union which is that of the perfect.

Innumerable are the imperfections of beginners who are still practising meditation. St John of the Cross draws a graphic picture of them, in order, as he says, "that the inferiority of that state may be understood, and that those who remain in it should excite in themselves a desire to be placed by God in that night, wherein their souls might become strong in virtue, and learn to relish the unspeakable delights of divine love" (*Night*, I, 1, p. 6).

In spite of their imperfections, or rather on account of their weakness, God grants great sweetness of devotion to those who enter generously the way of piety (*ibid.*). But when the time arrives for them to go up higher, the Lord weans them from these sensible pleasures and sends them aridity and interior darkness (ch. vii, p. 25).

This is the purifying process, the passive night; it can be recognized by three signs: (1) One no longer finds pleasure or consolation in the things of God, neither does one find them in creatures; (2) one's thoughts are usually directed towards God, but with trouble and uneasiness, because, no longer feeling any attraction to holy things, one imagines that one no longer serves him, and even shrinks from him; (3) one cannot meditate as formerly, being unable to make use of the reasoning powers, or of the imagination (ch. ix, p. 28, 32).

335. Without this trial, which makes it forsake the way of discursive prayer, the soul could not arrive at perfection. The holy author insists greatly on this point of doctrine, that meditation is insufficient, and that, to obtain perfect faith, which produces perfect love and the perfect practice of virtue, it is necessary to receive from God a much higher and more interior grace, which is the general knowledge of God poured directly into the soul by the Holy Spirit. Here are some passages to the point:

"How I long to persuade spiritual persons that this divine way (the way of perfection, *el camino de la perfeccion*) does not consist in a multiplicity of considerations, means, or consolations, however useful to beginners" (*Ascent*, II, 6, p. 123).

No natural idea can be of use to the understanding as to the proper means of uniting oneself to God; all the knowledge it can acquire (by reflections and meditations) is more of a clog than a help if adhered to; "Nothing, absolutely nothing in this world represented by the imagination, or conceived by the understanding, can serve as a proximate means for the union with God" (*ibid.*, 7, p. 129).

"Considerations, forms,[1] and methods of meditation are necessary for beginners, to give them a little love to

[1] The forms under which God is represented; for example, a great fire, a dazzling light, or all other forms whatever. This is the explanation given by St John of the Cross of this word "form," which he repeats frequently in these two chapters (11, 12), in which he desires to establish with precision that the soul at a given moment should renounce her reasonings and imaginary representations. He, with good reason, makes the remark (ch. 12, p. 158) that the mystical light which represents the perfections of God in a general and indistinct manner "is far removed from all distinct forms." From these words it has been concluded that he teaches (contrary to the general opinion) that mytsical light produces an intellectual vision! When the enormous difference, according to theologians, between the way in which the human understanding acts and that of pure spirits is considered, one cannot fail to be surprised to find such an assertion founded on such slender proof.

help their sensible devotion. They find therein some distant means of union with God, means by which, usually, souls have to avail themselves before they can arrive at the goal—that is to say, at the region of spiritual peace. However, this path must be traversed without stopping or renouncing the hope of attaining the end, which cannot be perceived from these distant means." It resembles the steps of a staircase on which one does not linger if one wishes to reach the upper rooms. "Certain spiritual men are strangely mistaken on this subject. After practising prayer by means of images, forms, and meditations suitable for beginners, should the Lord wish to attract them to more spiritual and more interior ways, he will do so by withdrawing the pleasure and consolation of discursive meditation, from which they neither dare nor know how to detach themselves, and to which they are accustomed" (ch. xii, pp. 147-148).

"From these practices of reasoning and imagination very little profit can be made (*pueden hacer muy poca hacienda*[1]). When souls are in some measure detached from the world God soon raises them to the state of contemplation . . . the senses are not any longer enriched but only the spirit. . . . God gives it in contemplation very spiritual graces, which are the knowledge and love of him" (*Living Flame*, str. iii, vers. 3, § 4 and 5, pp. 445-446).

336. This loving knowledge "is, at the start, so subtle and so delicate as to be almost imperceptible" (*Ascent*, II, 11, p. 151).

In order to render understood this incomplete, and, so to say, embryonic contemplation, and in what it consists let us recall first what perfect contemplation is.

Contemplation, according to St John of the Cross, springs from a vivid light enlightening the soul and communicating an extremely lofty idea of God. Lofty as it is, however, this idea is very indistinct; God is not represented under any form, and no words can describe the idea formed of him. It is not an idea of his greatness or beauty, goodness or power, but of all that and more. The only word by which the soul can express this thought is "God! God! God!"

This idea of God will strike the contemplative with such force that all things else will be forgotten, and long hours will seem like short moments (Third Degree). But this is

[1] The holy author has very clearly summed up his doctrine in this formula: Meditation should lead to contemplation as to its end (*Maxim* 276).

very rare. In most instances the soul is not absorbed in this way, but realizes the state of contemplation by the love which is at one and the same time vague yet delectable, and which fills the heart (Second Degree). Often, indeed, this love is not felt, but can be certified by the fact that nothing withdraws the mind of the contemplative, and that he has no wish to pause to consider anything, sacred or profane[1] (First Degree.—*Ascent*, II, 12).

337. Since, therefore, the foundation of contemplation is reduced to a general knowledge of God, and to a blind attraction for him, it is not surprising that the contemplative state can subsist in the midst of the wanderings of the imagination, painful to the soul, which, far from consenting to the divagations of this power, experiences a lively pain at having its peace and consolation troubled (*Ascent*, II, 12, p. 155).

If, in the state of contemplation, the imagination be not always quiet, it is the same with the lower appetites. St John of the Cross establishes this in another place. "It happens more than once that the soul is raised to a high degree of the union of quiet in the will, while the natural inclinations are disturbed in the inferior part; in spite of the trouble this produces, the higher part which takes no share in it remains in prayer" (*Ascent*, I, 11, pp. 78, 79; *cf.*, *Night*, I, 4, p. 14).

338. Here, then, are three different degrees of contemplation clearly established by our author. In the first

[1] This passage from *The Ascent of Carmel*, clear as it is, in which this doctrine is set forth, has been very imperfectly and scarcely intelligibly rendered in the three French translations that I know (P. Charles-Marie, Gilly, Carmélites de Paris). I give it here: "The proof which makes known that the soul is favoured with this secret knowledge and that she is occupied with it is that she feels no pleasure in thinking of anything whatever, low or high. . . . That this general knowledge of God may exist in the necessary degree in the cases of which we wish to speak, it suffices that there be in the understanding an absence of all particular knowledge of things temporal or spiritual, and that the will have no desire to apply any thought either to the one or the other, which indicates that the soul is otherwise occupied. This is the sign to be attended to in order to judge if the soul be in that state of forgetfulness of which we are speaking—that is to say, in a state of abstraction from created objects and in rudimentary contemplation—when the understanding alone participates in this general knowledge, for then sometimes the soul does not perceive it. For if the communication be made simultaneously to the will (and rebound on the sensitive appetite), as nearly always happens, the soul does not cease, with a little reflection, to understand more or less distinctly that it is held captive and absorbed by this knowledge; it realizes it by the delectable love that it feels (and the sign given above becomes superfluous)" (*Ed. crit.*, 11, 12, pp. 160, 161).

degree, only the understanding in its highest part participates in the contemplation,[1] and it is only experienced through reflection; in the second degree the contemplation is delectable, and finally in the third, which is more rare, every faculty has its share, and the soul's attention is completely absorbed.

339. According to St John of the Cross, the faithful advance progressively in the state of contemplation; at the beginning the general knowledge of the divine greatness is only given at intervals, and, most frequently, without producing that sweetness of devotion which makes contemplation so delightful. This is what we have named elementary contemplation. It takes away the taste for meditation, for the soul, although already realizing, however indistinctly, the divine perfections, has no longer any desire to arrive by troublesome reasonings at a truth already possessed, and to which, moreover, all the reasonings in the world could never lead. Further, divine grace no longer favours the practice of meditation, since the design of God is that the soul should enter a different path. The soul, therefore, having no attraction for meditation, and at the same time having no experience of the sweetness of contemplation, finds itself in a very trying state of aridity.

(3) *How to act in the trials of purification.*

340. Unhappily, few know how to profit by this salutary state; instead of entering the path of contemplation into which God desires to introduce them, they obstinately turn back and try to recover sensible devotion by reflections and meditation. Directors themselves too often, instead of helping the divine plan, turn these souls away from their true path; I have noted in another work the bitter reproach St John of the Cross and other saints utter against ignorant directors full of prejudice against contemplative ways, and I have demonstrated the responsibility they incur.[2]

If, on the contrary, the faithful correspond with the plans of God, if they consent to advance by the obscure way of faith, if they " renounce reasonings and all activity, not only exterior, but even interior, if they determine no longer to be engrossed in activities, then, in this holy idleness and total abandonment they will feel sustained

[1] I have shown in the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life* that the will always has some share in it, true contemplation always producing love (l. V, ch. iii, §§ v and vi).

[2] *Degrees of the Spiritual Life* (l. V, Part 3, ch. i).

inwardly by a spiritual nourishment of extreme delicacy" (*Night*, I, 9, p. 30).

It is only occasionally, especially at the beginning, and not on every occasion, that this general and indistinct knowledge of the divine greatness is given to the soul. When it is not received the soul must have recourse to reasonings and return to the practice of meditation (*Night*, I, 9, p. 32; *Ascent*, II, 13, p. 163). When, however, it is again communicated, it alone must be adhered to.

341. Such is the path by which God leads souls who apply themselves resolutely to the interior life. There are exceptions; there are those whom God does not will to lead to perfect contemplation. Why is this? He alone knows. For such as these, aridity is short-lived, and when it ceases they can, and ought, to return to meditation. But if these should be called to advance to perfection, *si es que han de ir adelante*, they will penetrate ever more deeply into the dark profundity of the night, and the work of sensible purification will be accomplished[1] (*Night*, I, 9, p. 32).

342. So true it is that this divine gift of contemplation is of such inestimable value that it should be preferred to any extraordinary favours which could be granted. The author would have us understand by these extraordinary favours, for which he makes use of the term "supernatural," visions, and revelations (*Ascent*, II, 14). These graces, which are not included in the common way, might produce pride, and make the soul fall into the snare of illusion, or, at least, place an obstacle to progress towards perfection. No one should wish for them, and if God bestow them, instead of becoming attached to, and constantly thinking about them, the soul should apply to contemplation—to a simple, quiet, and loving attention to God (*Ascent, ibid.*).

343. "The more the soul is habituated to remaining in repose, the more also will this general knowledge and love of God daily increase. This is a blessing above all others, because it procures without personal effort peace, quiet, delight, and consolation (*Ascent*, II, 11, p. 152).

Then, like one who, having a fountain within reach, has not to trouble to draw water, but can quench his thirst at his pleasure, so "this soul, when beginning to pray, need no longer be obliged to go far to fetch that spiritual

[1] Therefore those who are not thus purified are not called, God alone knows wherefore, either to a high perfection or a high contemplation. This is the meaning of this passage, which has been more than once ill-interpreted, and from which erroneous conclusions have been drawn.

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water and carry it to her lips by the aqueducts[1] of reasonings, forms, and images, but as soon as placed in the presence of God it becomes possessed of a vague knowledge, loving, and full of peace and calm; a delightful fountain where deep draughts of the waters of wisdom and love are imbibed (*Ascent*, II, 12, p. 154).

Having come to this point, the soul has then acquired, "in some measure, the habit of perfect contemplation; for then every time it tries to meditate it finds itself endowed with this peaceful and quiet knowledge, and has no longer any power to meditate, or even any wish to do so" (*Ascent*, II, 13, p. 163).

344. If it had cost the faithful soul much to arrive at this state, for the trials of the night of the senses with its aridity, temptations, and troubles of every kind. generally last a long time (*Night*, I, 14, p. 48), the advantages derived therefrom are immense. To the first imperfections succeed solid virtues, and an habitual recollection of God, and a holy way of acting are acquired not through any attraction or taste, but with the sole motive of pleasing him (*Night*, I, 13).

(4) *The night of the spirit.*

345. There still remains some weakness in these perfect souls. St John of the Cross points out especially heaviness of spirit and inclinations for distractions and exterior intercourse. If God desire to raise them higher after having kept them long enough in the contemplative way to increase their love (*Night*, II, 1, p. 51), he carries the purification further. He multiplies their trials and makes them tell on the innermost part of the soul.

"He deprives them of the pleasure and liking they had taken in things spiritual" (*Night*, II, 3, p. 56). They had already in the first night lost the pleasure and those feelings formerly produced in them by reflections and meditation; this time they are deprived also of the sweetness of contemplation. God communicates to them a more brilliant light, so bright as to dazzle them and to make them suffer. An excess of light causes discomfort and pain to our human eyes; and it is the same with the eyes of the soul. God communicates himself so abundantly that the soul, still very weak, cannot endure the amount of light and of the divine gifts, without suffering. Moreover, to be conscious of weakness is an intolerable pain to the

[1] It is to be remarked that St John of the Cross employs a comparison which recalls that of St Teresa (*Life*, ch. xiv and following).

heart, inflamed as it is with love yet incapable of loving as much as it would wish. Then is given a much more perfect idea of the majesty of the divine perfections, and also of personal poverty and misery; therefore it feels constrained, crushed, and annihilated. Or else God supports the will without giving strong light to the understanding; the faculties are as if enfeebled and stupified; St John of the Cross says, "God plunges the understanding into darkness, the will into aridity, the memory he makes void, and the heart he fills with bitterness, constraint, and the direst affliction" (*Night*, II, 3, p. 56).

Thanks to this salutary action which strengthens and purifies the soul, it becomes more capable of sustaining the divine impressions, and of receiving the most precious of gifts, the most intense love, and the most eminent virtue.

4. *Deviation from the traditional doctrine.*

346. Up to now we have found a great similarity of doctrine in the great Masters of every century, such as that which has been summed up above in twenty-one propositions. If this doctrine have been set forth more or less clearly, more or less completely, under different forms, it is in the main the same teaching, and it does not appear to have, so far, been opposed.

Does this mean that this lofty spirituality has been understood and appreciated by everyone? It is occasionally noticeable that mystical authors hint at some who do not relish their doctrine, and seem to criticize it and to be prejudiced against it. Even in ancient times the author of *Mystical Theology* advises Timothy to take care lest the rules he had given him on the way to raise himself to God should be imparted to the unworthy (ch. i). Suso found that some of his brethren rose against him and attacked his doctrine.[1] Louis of Blois, who had so ably pointed out the way to perfection in his celebrated *Spiritual Instruction*, found that his book was severely criticized; he mentions this in one of his letters, and declares that a great many are not in a state to understand what he teaches in this work on the constant progress of interior recollection, and on mystical theology.[2]

[1] *Exemplar*, Part I, ch. xxv.

[2] St Jane de Chantal, in the following century, complains that the prayer of very simple union and of abandonment "has been strongly opposed by those whom God was leading by the discursive way." Fr. Surin complains repeatedly of certain theologians who would not admit of the excellence of mystical ways, and who treated them as dreams and idle fancies. He hardly appears to believe in their humility. When these wiseacres depreciate in this way contemplative gifts with

There is, however, no indication that the critics described in this way had any pretension of being able to point out a different way of arriving at perfection than that taught by the Masters.

347. But, about the period at which we have arrived, it is to be remarked that there was a certain change in the traditional doctrine, which it is necessary to point out.

The first symptoms of a change of doctrine appear in the sixteenth century. There was then, especially in Spain, a very strong opposition to all mysticism, and even, which is still more strange, to all spiritual books. At the end of the Middle Ages in that country, as also in others, the simple people read little, and generally had no high idea of perfection; they contented themselves with regulating their lives according to the elementary principles of the Christian faith. Confessions and communions were rare, direction in desuetude, except in convents. Then, even if the faithful remained steadfast to the great duties of Christianity, yet real piety was very rare. Following the discovery of printing, an increase in spirituality resulted, and this is accounted for by the production and propagation of books of devotion and of lives of the saints. Men of fiery zeal encouraged this movement; in Spain, St Ignatius and his followers, Blessed John of Avila, Bartholomew of the Martyrs, Louis of Granada, among many others, laboured incessantly to diffuse and recommend good books, and also, as far as lay in their power, the frequentation of the sacraments of Penance, and the Holy Eucharist, and the practice of mental prayer.

Unhappily, at the same time the evil spirit raised a cloud of illuminism and false revelations, and some who were spiritual were deceived by visionaries; even Louis of Granada did not know how to be sufficiently on his guard against a certain "Illuminate" who was a Prior in Lisbon. At this time, also, the Protestants relied on the sacred writings for the propagation of their errors. Thus, while spiritual men made every effort in favour of piety, theologians, to whom we shall apply the title of the Intellectuals, more alarmed about the possible abuses that might arise than happy on account of the fruits of grace which were indicated, set themselves with all their might against a renewal of devotion so full of promise. The practices which seemed so salutary to some, the read-

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which they are not themselves favoured, or when they are pleased to declare that these gifts have nothing in common with perfection, are they not, in fact, actuated by a secret self-love?

ing of the Holy Scripture and pious books, the frequentation of the Sacraments, the making of mental prayer, appeared to others full of danger to the Faith. The Intellectual, who had most credit, but who was also the most violent, was Melchior Cano. By his learning, talent, and great renown, but also by his furious impetuosity, he set the fashion to all the rest, and may be regarded as the head of this school. Father Colunga, a Dominican, in his interesting articles in the *Ciencia tomista* (May, July, November, 1914) has described this struggle between the "Spirituals" and the "Intellectuals," and says that in 1556-7 Cano had given conferences at Valladolid before the Court, on the Epistles of St Paul, in which, under cover of combating the Protestants and Illuminati, he had in reality attacked the mystics. Carranza, another celebrated Dominican, then Archbishop of Toledo, had published a book entitled *Commentary on the Christian Catechism*. It was an explanation of the Catechism, setting forth the Catholic doctrine for the use of the faithful. Melchior Cano was entrusted with the task of making a report on this work, and although the work was excellent, the report was extremely unfavourable.[1] In the first place, the celebrated theologian utterly condemned the idea of giving to the faithful a religious instruction only suitable to priests; of teaching the people what are the matter and form of the sacraments, what are their ministers, rites, ceremonies, and conditions; he said that in doing so they do them as much harm as if they deprived them of the faith; in fact, to make the mysteries of faith public would be to profane them, and thus to diminish the respect due to religion; for the common people would become familiarized with holy things, and, not seeing any mystery in them, would have little esteem for them. And he cited the Illuminati of Spain, and also Harphius the celebrated disciple of Ruysbroeck, and others in support of his contention. In this way Cano constantly confounded the mystics and all spiritual persons with the Illuminati. He also opposed with vigour the reading of Holy Scripture in the vulgar tongue, and took to task those whose custom it was to make a daily confession. The zeal shown by spiritual persons to induce the faithful to make frequent use of confession and communion seemed to him very suspicious, and it is said of him that in one of his sermons he asserted that in his opinion one of the signs

[1] This report is found in the *Life of Melchior Cano*, by Caballero, Madrid, 1871.

of the coming of Antichrist was the frequentation of the Sacraments.

Another celebrated Dominican theologian, Dominic Soto, also gave his opinion about Carranza's book.[1] He was much more moderate, much more just; nevertheless, he made use of unfounded criticisms, which denoted a real prejudice against mystical tendencies. Other theologians were consulted, but were, as a rule, unfavourable, and finally the Spanish Inquisition, then directed by Valdes, Archbishop of Seville, a friend of Cano, who shared his prejudices, condemned Carranza's book. The catalogue of books prohibited by Valdes in 1559, besides the book of Carranza, included the *Counsels and Christian Rules* of Blessed John of Avila, the works of Fr. Louis of Granada, *The Guide for Sinners*, and the *Treatise on Prayer*. Melchior Cano had also drawn up a report on, or rather against, the works of this other celebrated Dominican; he found them very reprehensible in that they pretended to make contemplatives of all the faithful, and represented the way of perfection as possible for every state of life without the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience; and this, he said, was quite contrary to the Gospel, to the conduct of the Apostles, and to ecclesiastical doctrine. Louis of Granada appealed from this condemnation to the Council of Trent, and obtained from this illustrious assembly and from Pope Pius IV an approbation of his *Treatise on Prayer*. The works of Denis the Carthusian were also prohibited, as were the *Institutions* by Tauler, *The Works of a Christian*, just composed by St Francis Borgia; *Mystical Theology*, by Henry Harphius, etc. If the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius escaped condemnation it was only because they had been approved and praised by the Pope. It is to this decree that St Teresa alludes when she says (*Life*, ch. xxvi), "At the time when a great number of books were forbidden in Spain, I had much trouble."

The translation of Holy Scripture into modern tongues was equally forbidden, the only languages in which the Bible was allowed were Hebrew, Chaldaic, Greek, and Latin; and the smallest extracts from Scripture, passages of the Gospel, or the Epistles in print or manuscript, had to be given up to the Inquisition. In 1583 a new edition of the *Spanish Index*, published by Cardinal Quiroga, while continuing the prohibition of the translation of the

[1] The statement of Dominic Soto is to be found in vol. v of the *Documentos ineditos para la historia de España*. Peter Soto, on the contrary, was favourable to spirituality.

sacred Scriptures, nevertheless allowed those passages which were already translated in Catholic books, and the Epistles and Gospels of the Mass.

These prejudices of Melchior Cano against all mysticism were in a great measure the cause of his violent opposition to the Society of Jesus. In a letter of his the illustrious author of *De locis theologicis* writes thus: "I also, like you, have heard it said that the members of this Society follow John Tauler, Henry Harphius, and Baptist Crema. The last named has lately been condemned by Rome as an Illuminate and Quietist. Tauler and Harphius in many passages show that they belong to this sect of Illuminati and Quietists; I am not aware that they really were such, for I am not a judge of persons, but their doctrine displeases me. Of Ignatius I know on good authority that he fled from Spain, and that a process had been begun against him, while the Illuminati were being hunted out."[1]

Melchior Cano was the most fiery opponent of the spirituals, but there were many others everywhere who shared his ideas more or less. Fr. Colunga cites among the adversaries of Carranza a Jeronimite, John of Regla; a Franciscan, Bernard de Fresneda; a Benedictine, by name Rodrigo de Vadillo. "It can be said"—I am quoting Fr. Colunga—"that the distrust of books of devotion in the vulgar tongue was general. . . . This prejudice against the mystics kept growing. . . . The Society of Jesus itself, which at its institution appeared to Cano so suspicious on account of its mystical tendencies, which he regarded as Illuminism, proved afterwards as distrustful thereof as any other religious order, and its writers have recommended the common way more earnestly than the rest. Then, when the Illuminati of Llerena and of Seville, and when Molinos with his false doctrines, had rendered the struggle more fierce, those who confounded the mystics with the Illuminati and the Quietists became more numerous, and voices were raised demanding the condemnation of the works of St John of the Cross and of other holy personages."

Even in the Carmelite convents and round St Teresa there were some who had an extreme distrust of contemplation. In fact, the saint with an amiable malice said

[1] It is true that Crema was condemned, but he quickly corrected his errors, and his books are quite orthodox. He was the director of St Antony-Maria Zaccaria. The other authors accused by Cano by no means merit his indictment against them. It is useless to state that he was more mistaken still about St Ignatius.

in *The Way of Perfection* (ch. xxx, *sub fine*, *Obras*, t. iii, p. 311): "You who are the enemies of contemplatives must not imagine that you are exempt from becoming the same if you recite your vocal prayers well, and keep your consciences quite pure.[1] In spite of everything to the contrary, I propose treating of this subject. Those who do not wish to understand it have only to pass it over." She treats then of contemplation in the following chapter, but the first editor, who published the book in 1583, the year following the death of the saint, suppressed the entire chapter; without doubt, he was an "enemy of the contemplatives."

It is at this same period, and doubtless under the same influence, that the phrase used by St Teresa in the original manuscript, in which she stated that nearly all the religious of her convents had arrived at contemplation, was tampered with, and in its place was written that nearly all were in the way of ordinary meditation.

Fr. Joseph of Jesus-Mary Quiroga († 1629), who became a Carmelite only four years after the death of St John of the Cross, tells us that it was not long even in the Carmelite houses before they began to stray from the teaching of this great doctor of mysticism. He says, "When the influence and teaching of our saintly Father, Brother John of the Cross, ceased, other Masters arose who extolled the discursive method, and the bustling and hasty operations of the soul, more than the very simple spiritual acts which allow of the divine operation, and of the effects of supernatural influence by which perfection is attained. These Masters brought about a very different work in their disciples (than did St John of the Cross), for these disciples came from prayer with aching heads, and rarely showed that their minds had been greatly enlightened. And, as in the noviciate, they did not learn how they could enter into contemplation when they were ripe for that kind of prayer, they left the preparatory school without knowing the principal object of their vocation, and remained their whole life without knowing it, labouring in prayer with their natural powers without giving place to the divine operation which introduces perfection into the soul" (*Don que tuvo San Juan de la Cruz para guiar las almas*, ch. xxii, a work inserted in the critical edition of the works of St John of the Cross, t. iii, p. 569).

All the same there were holy religious in the Carmelite Order who professed the true mystical doctrine. Thus,

[1] St Teresa here repeats what she has always affirmed: if a soul be faithful it will receive contemplative graces.

at the beginning of the seventeenth century John of Jesus-Mary, of whom we shall speak later, and Michael de la Fuente, both died in the odour of sanctity, leaving remarkable mystical books. Even those who admire an acquired contemplation, and who, quite wrongly, call by this name the contemplation of which St John of the Cross speaks, denominate it thus in order to encourage souls to aspire to it. However, this contrivance, if contrivance it were, failed, and contemplation in general became more and more suspect.

Those who were named Intellectuals, whom we have shown as so greatly opposed to spirituality, had not formed any very clear idea of mystical states; they seemed to contemn them, and to wish to confine their knowledge to dogmatic and moral theology. There have always been, and there always will be, some persons of this sort, more or less disdainful of spirituality and particularly of mysticism, which they can scarcely understand, who take up a position in speculative, positive, and scholastic theology, exegesis, or history; but, at that time of fiery controversy against Protestantism it is not to be wondered at that this tendency prevailed, and that many came to believe ascetic and mystical theology negligible. A little later, before the magnificent mystical efflorescence which appeared in Spain, they were compelled in presence of St Teresa and of St John of the Cross, to show a greater esteem for spiritual science, and to study with a more respectful attention the states made famous by such great and holy persons. Nevertheless, these mystical states that they had despised, and that they continued to distrust, were still represented by most of them as states that it was of little use to understand, and rash to desire: they rated them as extraordinary.

Fr. Colunga tells us that, at the outset, in the Society of Jesus, the mystical tendency predominated; it was the same, he remarks, with the Theatines and the Barnabites, and it is usually so at the beginning of any religious order. But a little later, as the learned Dominican notes, the Society, following the general trend of ideas to be remarked at this time, showed itself very distrustful with regard to mystical states. In 1595 it had been necessary to be on guard against the errors disseminated by the Illuminati of Andalusia, and Fr. Balthazar Alvarez had been obliged, by order of the Provincial of Castile, to write a little treatise to refute them. Nevertheless, in the following year this saintly man became himself suspect by his brethren in religion; they believed him

to be infected with the errors of Illuminism, and too much infatuated with mystical states. A veritable tempest, his historian, the Ven. Fr. Louis Dupont, says, was raised against him by his brethren in religion. These latter denounced him to the General of the Order, Fr. Everard Mercurian, as teaching and recommending a method of prayer differing from that which St Ignatius had traced in the book of the *Exercises*. The General agreed with them, and entirely approved of the prohibition given to this holy religious by Fr. Diego de Avellana, "to make use of any other method of prayer *either for himself* or for others except that of the *Exercises*."[1]

The Ven. Fr. Dupont pointed out, in exculpation of these religious, who were otherwise commendable and virtuous men, that there were among the disciples of Fr. B. Alvarez some ignorant and indiscreet persons who misrepresented his doctrine, and even went so far as to despise the method of prayer taught by St Ignatius.

To these excessive strictures the fraternity of Fr. Alvarez opposed another excess, that of discrediting as they did the contemplative way; and the superiors were yet more blameable in having tyrannically prohibited Fr. Balthazar Alvarez from practising the method of prayer to which he was manifestly called by God, and imposing on him the method intended for beginners, which to him was well-nigh impossible. Was this through ignorance, narrow-mindedness, or an erroneous conception of the spirit of their institute? It was at this time that St Teresa complained of the very small number of directors who understood and applied the rules of the contemplative life, and she affirms that many souls suffered from this: it was also the time when St John of the Cross stood so vigorously against the same abuse and, like her, affirmed that it was very common. So the detractors of Fr. Alvarez were not alone in misunderstanding the ways of contemplation, but they were quite wrong in imagining that the teaching of their Associate compromised the doctrine of the book of the *Exercises*.

348. Doubtless we cannot find in this admirable book the rules that we have seen given by the other Masters, but no conclusion can be drawn from this circumstance, either against St. Ignatius or against contemplation.

Let us hear Suarez: he settles the objection, which no doubt had been formulated in his time (*De Rel.*, tract. X, l. IX, ch. vi).

[1] See the article by F. Dudon, S.J., in the *Revue d'ascétique et de Mystique*, January, 1921.

"Contemplation being the highest degree of spiritual exercises," says this great theologian, "it is surprising that throughout the whole book of *Exercises* it should have been passed by in silence,[1] and that there should have been no question but of prayers and meditation. There are, in fact, three degrees in the spiritual life: the purgative, the illuminative, and the contemplative way; the first is treated in the exercises of the first week, all the other meditations seem suitable to the illuminative way, and there is absolutely nothing for the contemplative way. Moreover, our reflections and our prayers should begin with creatures and with ourselves, and afterwards we should attach ourselves to the humanity of Jesus Christ in order to arrive at the Divinity, and to become united to him. Now, in the book of the *Exercises* we see plainly the first considerations on creatures and on ourselves; but how are we to consider God in himself, his attributes, and perfections? How should we unite ourselves to him? Nothing is said about this, and from this point of view the doctrine is incomplete.

"No," answers Suarez, "the contemplative way has not been altogether omitted; it has been indicated, or at least insinuated, inasmuch as it depends on our own efforts. The fourth week consecrated to the thought of the Resurrection, in which the grace of an immense joy in the infinite joy and glory of Jesus Christ is besought, belongs to the unitive way, because its aim is, not the correction of faults (the purgative way) nor progress in virtue (the illuminative way), but the exercise of hope and charity, in which is a foretaste of eternal happiness. At the end of this fourth week is placed that contemplation for obtaining the grace of divine love, and this belongs especially to the contemplative way. Besides, at the beginning of this contemplative way, if the subjects of prayer have to be changed, still there are few changes to be made in the method to be followed. Later, when some progress has been achieved, there is no longer a method to be followed, because the acts become much more simplified, the soul being rather passive than active therein. Our Father, St Ignatius, leads us to the threshold of the way of contemplation; he indicates clearly the method and the subject, and, satisfied with putting sensible people in the right path, he leaves the rest to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; this is why he so rarely

[1] St Ignatius often uses the word "contemplation," but not in the sense in which spiritual authors use it; what he calls contemplation is really meditation.

speaks about union with God, and about the very simple act of contemplation."

It was wisely said: the silence kept by the holy author on the subject of contemplation diminishes nothing of the merit of his book. St Ignatius usually gave his Exercises during a retreat of four weeks; the aim which he proposes is, as he expressly declares at the beginning of his book, to "dispose the soul to free itself from all irregular affections, and after having got rid of them, to seek and to discover the will of God in the regulation of life with a view to salvation." In truth, no other method than that of St Ignatius could be better adapted to attain this result; and very admirable fruit has been derived from it. Good, but imperfect souls; weak, and even sometimes worldly, souls came out of the retreat of the Exercises determined to give themselves unreservedly to God; and by this were set in the way of perfection. But it would not have been an opportune moment to lay down rules for the life of contemplation, which is that of the perfect. When souls have to be brought to rid themselves of ill-regulated affections, there is no question then of contemplation, nor have they to be instructed as to how they should act therein.

Sixty years later St Francis de Sales composed a book no less admirable, *The Introduction to a Devout Life*, with a similar aim, that of enabling the faithful to follow the way of piety and of perfection, but very wisely omitted rules for the life of contemplation, which he only gave later in his *Treatise on the Love of God*.

349. If we have dwelt on this subject, it is because the brethren of Fr. Balthazar Alvarez were not the only severe critics of contemplation on account of their attachment to the *Exercises*.[1]

It is said in *The Practice of Perfection*, by Rodriguez (*On Prayer*, ch. vii): "Among the many very great graces that it has pleased God to bestow on the Society of Jesus there is one that is very special, that of having given us a method of prayer approved by the Holy See. . . . This form of prayer was communicated to St Ignatius by our Lord himself, and he taught it to us in the same manner in which he had received it; therefore, let us not seek any other way, nor attach ourselves to other kinds of extraordinary prayer, but let us remain settled in that which

[1] This objection, drawn from the silence of the *Exercises*, is even in our days one of those insisted upon by persons who reject the traditional doctrine (*vide, Les Études*, January 20, 1900; October 20, 1908; January 5, 1909; *Pratique de l'Oraison mentale*, t. ii, Part 5, ch. ii).

we have, and let us try to conform ourselves to it entirely, and, like good children, let us imitate our Father."

If the author[1] had only intended to show forth the excellence of the method of St Ignatius, that would be perfect, but, as regards contemplation, he was far from striking the right note, and that which another son of St Ignatius, Fr. de Caussade, wrote two centuries later may rightly be applied to him. "There are some authors who, in speaking of ordinary contemplation, or of ordinary passive prayer, give such magnificent and lofty ideas of it that some are too dazzled, while others are too disheartened to aspire to it. . . ."[2]

Rodriguez here makes no distinction between common contemplation so much recommended by the Masters, and that which is extraordinary, in which a man is so enraptured and absorbed in God that he becomes oblivious of himself and of everything.[3]

To him there are but two methods of prayer, that of St Ignatius to which we must hold, and contemplation, which is an extraordinary and sublime way, to which no rule applies, and to which it would be rash to pretend (chs. iv, v, vii).

Rodriguez (ch. v) tries to support this doctrine on the authority of St Bernard, and he quotes the sermon xlvi on the Canticle of Canticles: "This great saint," says he, "is content with the practice of virtue and sorrow for sin, but as for contemplation, he leaves that for the Apostles and for apostolic men."

Unfortunately for our author the teaching of St Bernard is quite the opposite; the texts already given prove this; but what is more surprising is that in this very sermon St Bernard says exactly the contrary of that which Rodriguez puts in his mouth. He strongly approves of the desire for contemplation, *Appetis et ipse contemplationis quietem et bene facis*, and he wishes that souls would dispose themselves to receive this grace by the practice of good works and the exercise of virtue; it is

[1] If I here contest that which many contemporary writers have called "the exclusiveness of Rodriguez in favour of meditation," I am none the less filled with esteem for the author of *Christian Perfection*, and quite convinced that the work in which, with such good feeling and conviction, he has reproduced the teaching of Cassian and of many other masters has, during three centuries, done much good to pious souls. But precisely because he always has, and deserves to have, many readers it is necessary to show how, on one point of great importance, he deviated from the traditional doctrine.

[2] *Instr. spir.*, part ii, dial. 4.

[3] *Tan absorto y embebecido en Dios que ni se acuerda de si, ni entienda como es aquello, ni por donde va, ni por donde viene* (ch. iv).

necessary, he reminds us, to share the fecundity of Lia before enjoying the embraces of Rachel. That which he leaves to the Apostles and to apostolic men are favours of a totally different nature; prophecy, the gift of working miracles, the interpretation of tongues; while for himself he desires peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, words which the authors of that time often applied to contemplation.

350. Nevertheless, there are many passages in the works of Rodriguez in which the traditional doctrine is given due justice. Thus, he sets it forth very clearly in the whole of the sixth chapter, and ends in this way: "This doctrine is followed unanimously by all the saints when they show the three methods of prayer answering to the three ways named respectively: purgative, illuminative, and unitive . . . they all agree that, before applying ourselves to this kind of lofty prayer (contemplation), which answers to the unitive way, we should practise the purgative and illuminative ways." And in the twelfth chapter he speaks thus: "Meditation and all the other mental functions in prayer are all with a view to contemplation; they are the rungs of the ladder by which we have to climb."

In the thirteenth chapter he writes: "The Masters of the spiritual life say that prayer has reached the highest degree of perfection when one no longer endeavours to urge oneself on to the love of God by means of meditation, because the heart, being entirely filled with this love after which it sighed, enjoys it, and rests in it as the end if its desires and research."

And in the seventeenth chapter he speaks of the prayer of St Augustine and St Francis, who passed days and nights repeating these words: "Who art thou, Lord, and who am I?" "My God and my all," a prayer very much like that which Isaias says the blessed make in heaven, where, enraptured in the contemplation of the divine Majesty, they sing without ceasing: "Holy! Holy! Holy!" Then he adds: "But to arrive at this we should do all in our power by accustoming ourselves to reflect at leisure on the mysteries of religion. Although it is true that, to obtain the gift of prayer, or any other supernatural gift, our own efforts are insufficient, and that this gift must come to us from the bountiful hand of God, it is nevertheless true also that God would have us exert ourselves as though we could acquire it for ourselves."

Unfortunately, these passages are but little noticed; later we shall find that other authors sustain the contention we have objected to in Rodriguez without taking notice of his corrections.

351. However, it would be very unjust to say that the tendency which has been pointed out had gained ascendency over all the Society. Quite the contrary. Fr. Everard Mercurian, it is true, fully favoured the feeling of distrust of contemplative prayer; at the end of the accusations against Fr. Balthazar Alvarez he made it a rule to charge superiors never to allow, without special authorisation, the reading of Tauler, Harphius, and other mystical authors. But the General who succeeded, Fr. Claude Aquaviva, corrected the errors of his predecessor, and wrote a letter giving it to be understood that this sort of prayer and of spirituality was in no way contrary to the spirit of the Society. He said therein: "Those religious who have often practised meditation, and who have been long accustomed to prayer, and have acquired facility in it, do not require to have a settled subject to meditate upon, nor a special method. The spirit of the Lord is unfettered (*laxissimis habenis*). He has innumerable ways of enlightening souls, and of uniting them firmly to himself. He can neither be curbed nor limited, and we recall the words spoken by Fr. Nadal of holy memory, words full of piety and wisdom: 'We must follow the divine Doctor; we must not go before him.' . . . Therefore, while being very severe to false contemplatives, we must hold by the constant experience of the holy Fathers, and not forbid *contemplation to our brethren.* If there be a known fact, proved by the Fathers, it is that true and perfect contemplation is more powerful, more efficacious than all other methods of prayer to break down the pride of men, to crush it utterly, to excite the indolent to obey their superiors, and the slothful to work more earnestly for the salvation of souls."

Further, it is only just to state, the most remarkable authors of the Society have kept the traditional doctrine admirably; we will cite among others, St Alphonsus Rodriguez, Suarez, the Venerable Louis Dupont, about this period; and a little later Frs. Le Gaudier, Lallemant, Surin, Rigoleuc,[1] and finally, de Caussade and Grou in the eighteenth century.

[1] To these names may be added those of Lessius, 1554 to 1623 (*vide* his prefaces to the *Divine Perfections* and *Divine Names*), and of Fr. Vincent Huby, one of the founders of retreats. This saintly religious was doubtless alluding to those who showed too great a mistrust of contemplative ways when he said, speaking of prayer: "It is to be feared that in wishing to oppose false spirituality, that which is true may be hurt" (*Vie des fondateurs des retraites,* p. 230). This warning, which would be very opportune in our own days, already became so in the seventeenth century.

Many Fathers of the Society have assured me that there is

Then, if the letter written by St Ignatius to St Francis Borgia (Rome, 1548), to induce him to moderate his excessive penance, be read with attention, it will be seen that the holy founder had the same ideas as the other Masters about mystical graces: he considered that they were to be desired, not on account of the pleasure they procured, but because without them the soul remained imperfect, and did not serve and glorify God as much as in duty bound.

"Instead of trying to make a little blood flow, *seek* with more instance our divine Master himself, I mean *his very holy gifts*, as, for example, the gift of tears, which will enable you to weep for your sins, and those of your neighbour; either for the mysteries of our Lord's life on earth and in heaven, or sometimes out of love for the divine Persons; or again the intensity of faith, hope, and charity; the gift *of joy and of spiritual repose*, and immense consolations, *the elevation of the spirit, the divine impressions and illuminations*, and all the other tastes and spiritual feelings relating to these gifts, such as humility. . . . All these very holy gifts should be *preferred* to all corporal acts (of mortification), which are only good as far as they serve to acquire these gifts, either altogether or in part. By this I do not intend to imply that we ought to seek them only on account of the pleasure and delight they afford us; certainly not. But recognizing that *without these gifts all our thoughts, words, and actions are imperfect, cold, and disturbed, we ought to desire them*, that by their means we may become true, fervent, and clear for the better service of God. From this it results that *we ought to wish to possess* such precious gifts wholly or partially, and these spiritual

found in our days among them a double current, some following the opinions of Fathers Lallemant and Surin, others becoming in preference the disciples of Rodriguez and Scaramelli. I venture respectfully to ask these partisans of Rodriguez and Scaramelli how they reconcile the doctrine of these two writers with that of the great mystical authors. "If Rodriguez be right on this point, all the teaching of St John of the Cross falls to the ground," an eminent religious who had read more than twenty times the whole of the books of the great Spanish mystic, said to me one day. And, indeed, it is not only with St John of the Cross that Rodriguez disagrees when he shows contemplation as a quite extraordinary prayer at which it is rash to aim, but with the whole of tradition, and particularly with those weighty authors whose names I have mentioned. These form a pleiad of spiritual writers of very great importance, of whom the Society of Jesus has a right to be proud; perhaps there is no other religious body which, in the same space of time, has given to the Church so many and such remarkable mystical authors. Their teaching can be held without fear; it is certainly a good school.

graces, in order, as far as we are able with their help, to procure the greater glory of God."

St Francis Borgia did not think differently, since he had written two years previously to the holy founder (January 16, 1546): "I beg of you to ask of God for me one *gift*, for the acquisition of which he has begun to dispose me. I see that he wishes to grant it to me, and that he has begun to do so; but my weakness is such that in one hour it destroys what the angel of God has taken a month to build. Thus there is a great want of perseverance, and a necessity of returning constantly to lay the first stone again. Your Reverence will assist me with your strength and the help of your prayers. And this is my request, that our Lord will give me the desire to repeat these words of the Prophet: *Providebam Dominum in conspectu meo semper*. May your Reverence help me to obtain that *gift* which God himself desires for his creatures, namely the *practice of continual contemplation* for which we have been created."

"I hear it said," he wrote again to the Provincial of Aragon, "that your Reverence imposes on your subjects always to make acts of love in their prayers (this, doubtless, means constantly and to the exclusion of other acts) and that you wish to conduct them all by this way. I praise the zeal and good desires of your Reverence, for, indeed, this is the highest and the best of spiritual exercises, but I must warn you, my dear Father, that *all are not called* to this state, that all would not understand it, nor could attain it. To direct us in prayer, Our Lord has given us a good guide, the Spiritual Exercises of the Society; therefore, some will continue to make use of this method, while others will take to different ways of praying: *Alius quidem sic, alius vero sic*, and as all are good, freedom ought to be allowed. The movements of the Holy Spirit are diverse, and diverse also are the talents and intelligence of men."[1]

[1] Father Suau, *Hist. de Saint François de Borgia*, p. 393.

CHAPTER IX

MYSTICAL DOCTRINE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1. *St Alphonsus Rodriguez.*

352. The author of *The Practice of Christian Perfection* died in 1616, and the following year another son of St Ignatius, who bore the same name, went to heaven—St Alphonsus Rodriguez (1531-1617).

Having very little acquired science—the single year that he had passed at Alcalá not having been sufficient to make a learned man of him—to make up for this deficiency a high degree of that science of the saints, inspired by infused light received from God as much as by a long experience, was his. I will not analyze in detail all his doctrine; it is better to advise the reader to procure the two charming treatises containing extracts from his works, *Explanation of the Petitions in the "Our Father"* and *The Union and Transformation of the Soul in God.*[1]

353. It will there be seen how this holy brother exalts the advantages of contemplation and of union with God. He says: "It is the kingdom of heaven on earth, it is the paradise of delights which it is possible to enjoy here below" (*Explanation of the Petitions of the "Our Father,"* ch. xii).

He wishes "this kingdom to be asked of our Lord with tears and sighs, with perseverance and perfect confidence, because there is nothing he gives with greater pleasure than his love" (*ibid.*, ch. xv). He indicates the means by which it can be obtained. These are, first of all, prayer and mortification (*ibid.*, ch. xi and xiii; cf. *Of Union and Transformation*, ch. v, vi, vii, and viii). He says also elsewhere (*Of Union and Transformation*, ch. xiii): "When one who is thus mortified and subdued, being bereft of all self-love, and emptied of all created things, free from all that weighed him down and from every obstacle, he finds himself at once in the bosom of God and enjoying God in an ineffable manner, he walks always in his presence and discovers him in all his creatures. He looks at God and contemplates him, adores, loves, and enjoys him in them. He beholds him in the flowers, and loves him in them; sees him in every kind of plant and in

[1] Published by the Society of St Augustine, Desclée, Lille.

all the beautiful objects of the fields; sees, loves, and adores him in the birds of the air, and the fishes in the sea, and in every work of his hands. He sees, loves, and adores the Lord in all his creatures from the greatest even to the least, and derives from this contemplation a great knowledge of God, and such love for his divine Majesty as to lose sight of all these creatures, to find himself alone with God and feeding on his love. His fervour makes him forget himself and all things, to become absorbed in God's infinite beauty and goodness, in his limitless power, majesty, and his very Being, tasting in him a sovereign joy such as no creature could impart, and finally resting in him as his God and his love."

354. What fruits are derived from this love? "The admirable virtue of charity, which transforms the soul entirely into God; for he who gives himself to God ceases to belong to himself, and from the time he possesses this charity he can say: *Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus* (Gal. ii, 20), that is, he no longer lives, but God lives in him; he belongs to God, for he has given himself to God unreservedly through love.

"This is effected by fervent love, and love imparts light to see and to know God. Love causes him to give himself to God, and light to know him.

"Also from knowledge proceeds love; love engenders a total abandonment to the Beloved one, so that the man is in God and God in him; from this it results that he becomes a burning furnace of love and at last arrives at being wholly transformed into God" (ch. xiv).

"When he has given to God all that he has and all that he is, God bestows on him a lively faith, a firm hope, and an immovable confidence with a burning, ardent, perfect charity. He adorns him also with profound humility, a patience full of meekness, the virtues of prudence, fortitude, and justice, the gift of constant prayer, and the grace to imitate the very holy life of Jesus Christ our Lord. This perfect charity also strips him of the coarse, vile, and soiled sackcloth of self, and clothes him with the most precious brocade of the divinity. The love between God and the soul comes to the point that one gives to the other all that he has and all that he is, and demands that the other repay him in like manner. *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*" (ch. xvi).

355. Further on St Alphonsus Rodriguez admirably describes how perfect humility is born of contemplative love: "Happy the man whose whole joy and consolation consists in treating always with God, remaining in his

presence, and humbling himself before him. What great light God communicates to him! What self-knowledge and ardent charity! Knowledge of himself compels him to humble himself and to annihilate himself before God, no longer with the help of reasonings and holy reflections, but in consequence of the clear light given him to know himself as he really is, and to know God. This knowledge increases with the love of God, and love produces greater light. The more light he possesses, the more profoundly does he humble himself, and the greater become his knowledge and love of God. It is a divine practice to treat with God; indescribable are the graces received in this intercourse. St Francis and St Augustine experienced it. St Augustine exclaimed, 'My God, may I know thee!' and St Francis: 'Who art thou, and who am I?' It was in this way that they arrived at such great sanctity and profound humility.

"These prayers prove also that charity and humility are always united and assist each other like two good sisters, because St Francis and St Augustine, in their petitions, put these virtues together. To know God is to love him, and to know oneself makes one to humble and hate oneself. Who can say what God revealed to them concerning this double knowledge? The light he poured into their souls no doubt made them discern their slightest faults, imperfections, negligences, and omissions, those failings public or private, and those of which they had been till then oblivious. In this way they acquired so great a degree of humility that if by their means God had worked all the miracles and marvels that all the saints had worked, they would have felt no exaltation and would have thought nothing of it. In fact, they realized that God was everything and they nothing.

356. "It is by means of prayer that God communicates this clear knowledge to the souls of the just. In prayer the brightest light comes to them without the help of the understanding in a distinct vision. In humble abasement of themselves they are raised by God to a clear knowledge of him (*humilibus dat gratiam*) and to great sanctity. The higher God raises his saints, the lower do they sink in their own estimation, and God and the saints, it would seem, vie with each other—the saints to abase themselves, and God to raise them. In this way, realizing the love of God and practising humility, they follow a safe path.

"It is true that by meditation and reflection God grants souls a certain light to know themselves, but it is like a ray through a rift in the clouds compared to the light communicated by God through love and prayer" (ch. xix).

2. *Suarez.*

357. Suarez, born at Granada in 1548 or 1549, died in 1617, in the same year as St Alphonsus Rodriguez. We find in him, undeniably, a mystical writer of the first order, for to eminent contemplative gifts he united a sure and extensive science. Nothing was wanting to him; learning, talent, personal experience—all were his. Contemporary and compatriot of St Teresa, it may be said of him that he was also her fellow-student, because he frequently went to seek counsel and light on high questions of spirituality from his brother in religion, Fr. Balthazar Alvarez, the saint's principal director.

His *Treatise on Mental Prayer* is a veritable masterpiece. It will be necessary to summarise the doctrine it contains,

358. Mental prayer comprises all the interior acts by which we honour God. All virtues find their place in it, but, above all, those of faith, hope, and charity, obedience, respect for God, mortification, and humility.

As the author of *The Ladder of the Cloister*—who treated this question in an excellent manner—said, there are four degrees in prayer—reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation (ch. ii).

Contemplation is, then, the crown of the other three; it is the goal towards which they should tend (ch. ix, Nos. 1, 3, 4).

359. To speak correctly, contemplation is an act of the understanding pausing to consider certain objects worthy of admiration, such as, first, God and his perfections, his majesty and goodness; then divine mysteries—for instance, the Incarnation, the Holy Eucharist, and the works and benefits of God. But these reflections should not be simply speculative; they ought to be practical and aim at union with God, and by this union the sanctification of him who contemplates (ch. ix, Nos. 6 and 8). The will, therefore, has its task, and a very important one; it is love that produces contemplation, and this in its turn excites and increases love. It is this that renders contemplation of so much value; it is the better part that Mary chose. Nothing is above charity, especially that fervent and burning charity which is the fruit of contemplation. As the intuitive vision, which is no other than perfect and eternal contemplation, lights up in the souls of the elect a very ardent love, so the contemplation of the just in this world produces an ardent charity. There are, evidently, between these two contemplations great differences, this among others: In heaven the intuitive vision necessitates love, which at once attains its whole development and receives no renewal of

the power to increase; here, on the contrary, contemplation produces a love which remains free and has always a possibility of growth. And it does grow in fact, for, by an admirable exchange, the contemplation of the divine goodness augments love, and love renders contemplation more attentive and searching, in so much that contemplation and love continually increase (No. 11).

This contemplation engenders a feeling of profound respect and absolute submission to God, and also of happiness and perfect sweetness (No. 12).

360. When the phenomenon of contemplation is analyzed it will be seen that the foundation of it in no way differs, as to the acts of the will, from that of inferior prayer: there are the same acts, but more perfect, more intense, and more fervent, and also more calmly practised, and with more uniformity and continuity. As regards the understanding, another act is added in contemplation to the acts made in meditation, and this is the attentive consideration of the known truth that has no longer to be sought (No. 13).

This attentive and apparently immovable contemplation of the truth, which is the contemplative act itself, is compared by Richard of St Victor to the immobility of those birds which rise to a great height and remain resting on their outstretched wings, hovering as though suspended (ch. x, No. 1).

361. Is the contemplative act preceded by reflections? On one hand, it does not seem possible to be otherwise, since contemplation is the attentive consideration of the truth, and that the human mind does not arrive at truth except by the reason. But, on the other hand, it often happens that the illiterate and ignorant, who are incapable of clever reasoning, are quite capable of contemplation. Besides, what else is contemplation but the judgement of the soul on a truth of faith? Now, a judgement is not a reasoning; it is a simple acquiescence; it is the acceptation of a truth proposed to our belief (ch. x, Nos. 2 and 3).

The fact is that contemplation is always preceded by some reasoning, as it bears on either a dogma of faith or a truth deduced from this dogma;[1] and that every act of faith is necessarily reasoned, since it rests on this motive: God has said it. But this reasoning may be entirely implicit, and the soul need not think of it any more when

[1] A dogma of faith such as, for example, the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, or the divine perfections. A truth deduced from dogmas of faith, such as, for example, "Jesus is near to me, on this altar, in this tabernacle. He is in my heart."

pausing to consider and to weigh[1] the truth which is the object of contemplation (No. 4).

362. Three gifts of the Holy Ghost co-operate in contemplation—understanding, wisdom, and knowledge. Understanding gives ideas of the things of faith much more perfect and profound than all those that can be acquired by reasoning; it causes that lively admiration, that firmness of faith, and that pleasure which is found in contemplation. Knowledge and wisdom make it understood how much these truths deserve to be loved; they show how reasonable they are, how much to be enjoyed, and that they should be made a rule of conduct (No. 9).

363. Does the contemplative act last for any length of time? In itself, no, as the holy doctors St Gregory, St Bernard, and St Thomas have recognized; and the reason is this: To arrive at contemplation, the senses, and all that comes to us through them, must be put aside. All reasoning must be discarded, and the simple consideration of one thing, very elevated and entirely spiritual, must be dwelt upon. Now, all this cannot take place without doing great violence to nature and rising above self. It is therefore very difficult to remain for a length of time in this state. Doubtless the love which accompanies contemplation helps to prolong it, but this is on condition that love itself varies and multiplies its acts, producing in succession praise, thanksgiving, holy resolutions, protestations of respect, devotion, submission, and, above all, of admiration and joy. These acts may succeed each other, in fact, without the mind being diverted from the same object—remaining, for example, attentive to the infinite grandeur of God. It may happen also that the mind itself will vary its acts, passing from the thought of the divine greatness to that of his goodness, then pausing for a time to consider certain of his benefits, or of the divine mysteries, without arrangement and without seeking, but responding to every breath of divine grace. It is in this way that contemplation can be most frequently prolonged, and even last a long time, as experience proves (Nos. 9, 10, and 13).

364. The great theologian proves in the eleventh chapter that contemplation is the right of the perfect, and shows how well founded is the distinction of the three methods of mental prayer—the purgative for beginners, the illuminative for the more advanced, and the unitive or contemplative, which is that of the perfect.

[1] Suarez frequently makes use of the word *ponderare* (to weigh) in describing the contemplative act; it is easier to understand than to render properly. To weigh a truth is to pause to ascertain the importance of it, to calculate its bearing, and to estimate its value.

Whether one view contemplation as the perfect union of love with God or as the most perfect knowledge of God obtainable in this life, either way it is the characteristic of the perfect.

Contemplation is not always the monopoly of the perfect, but is occasionally met with in others. Further, it is not only the end to which the perfect life leads, but also a means[1] of obtaining perfection.

365. In order to prove that contemplation belongs by right to perfect souls, it is necessary to call to mind the distinction of the three states of the spiritual life.

The first is the state of beginners; these still have strong passions; they do not easily overcome serious temptations, and practise virtue with great difficulty. The more advanced have become sufficiently masters of their passions to avoid with facility the commission of mortal sin; they endeavour to advance in virtue, but have still much trouble in overcoming venial sin. Attached as they are to the things of this world, having their minds full of all kinds of thoughts, and hearts agitated by a thousand desires, how can they possibly avoid it? The greater number of people remain in this state either all their lives or, at any rate, for many years.[2] The perfect, who are detached from earthly things, and have very little trouble with their passions, have hardly any other care than to please God and to be united to him. The perfection of this life consists, in fact, according to St Thomas, in avoiding venial sin and in thinking lovingly of God, not at long intervals, but frequently and even continuously.

These distinguishing marks are evidently not absolute; the perfect may experience very violent temptations,[3] and the advanced suffer the rebellions and difficulties of beginners, even as these may not have violent assaults to repel. However, the distinctive marks that we have denoted indicate the ordinary and predominant disposition of each category.

[1] *Cf.* above, No. 359, where Suarez has explained his thought.

[2] Suarez repeats the same truth, *De Relig.*, Tr. X, l. IX, ch. vi, No. 6 :*Major pars hominum, etiam bonorum et ex instituto ac electione Deo servientium, est in statu proficientium.*

[3] It is very true that in the perfect the passions are deadened and almost extinct, but the devils can awaken them; often they set upon the most advanced souls with fury, and God allows them to do so for the good of his faithful. But when the perfect are tried in this way there is a great difference between their temptations and those of beginners: it is that with the former the will is no longer vacillating; it is firmly attached to the love of God. However painful may be their struggles, only rare and very slight weaknesses can be met with in the midst of brilliant and almost continual victories.

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366. To these three states three ways or methods of prayer correspond—the purgative, which is that of beginners, the illuminative that of the advanced, and the unitive that of the perfect.

With mystical authors this is a classical division, and, besides, is well grounded, for if prayer belongs to every degree of the spiritual life, its mode varies according to the state of the subjects. Therefore, as the state of beginners is not the same as of those who have made some progress, or of those who have acquired perfection, so also necessarily prayer has three gradations.

Beginners who are struggling against sin apply themselves to produce in prayer acts of detestation of evil, and of firm purpose to avoid it, and they have recourse to the meditations most likely to excite sentiments of fear and sorrow. The more advanced exercise themselves in the practice of virtue, and in accepting patiently the trials of life; they would therefore consider preferably the rewards of virtue, or else the example of our Lord and the saints. This is called the illuminative way, because they receive ever-increasing light on the practice of virtue and the means for making progress.

The property of the unitive way is that of producing acts of the love of God, of enjoying great peace and tranquillity of soul, and a truly spiritual happiness. The unitive way supposes that the other two ways have been left behind, for it exacts a mind purified and set free from the first struggles, master of its passions, and also enlightened by assiduous meditation on divine things and on the practice of Christian virtues. Also in this state a number of reflections are not necessary, nor yet long reasonings; it is sufficient to think of God, his attributes and benefits, and, if necessary, to rely on these thoughts to produce acts of love from the heart; for the essence of perfection in this path consists, above all, in feelings of love. It is to this unitive way—that is to say, to contemplation[1]—that St Bernard alludes in his letter to his brethren of the *Mons Dei*.[2] "Prayer is the loving union of the soul with God, a tender and familiar converse, and a

[1] There are those who testify surprise in seeing how Suarez identifies the unitive way with contemplation (see also the passage quoted above, No. 348), but one can only feel astonished at their surprise. It was, in fact, the ordinary doctrine, and Suarez, who always points out and combats the opinions that he does not agree with, does not seem to imagine that on this point anyone could contradict him. Rodriguez himself, and this is what condemns him, recognized that contemplation is the prayer of the unitive way (see above, No. 350).

[2] This letter is not by the holy doctor, but by a writer of his time.

repose of the soul, which, enlightened by the light of grace, enjoys as long as possible the divine sweetness."

367. The division which has just been repeated, of the three states of the spiritual life, and of the three degrees of prayer answering to them, is not so decided as not to admit of some blending. On the contrary, each of these states participates in some small degree in the other two; the practices and methods of prayer of one are sometimes suitable to those souls who are in an inferior or higher degree. Thus there is no perfection so great as not to be mixed with numerous imperfections, nor which does not occasionally require the remedies of the purgative way. To establish a distinction between these states the most striking characteristics of a soul have to be considered, and the method of prayer best suited to its needs.

When we say that contemplation is the property of the perfect, we speak of a contemplation which is habitual and practised at pleasure,[1] not that which is transitory and occasional. To have such a facility implies having acquired self-mastery by having overcome the passions, having practised prayer for a length of time, acquired virtue, and received great light; things which belong only to the perfect. Yet there are to be found perfect souls who do not possess contemplation in such a high degree, either because God in his unfathomable wisdom refuses it to them for reasons known only to himself, or else on account of their interior dispositions. Thus mental instability or dulness of intellect may prove an obstacle.

On the contrary, there may be found among the imperfect themselves a beginning of contemplation. All the faithful should apply themselves according to their powers to the making of perfect acts of love. Since this love belongs to the unitive way, it would be well to become habituated gradually to remaining calm and peaceful, united to God by love so far as he himself gives them grace.[2]

368 (ch. xii). Can contemplation take place in a com-

[1] *Ex habitu.* A *habitus* is a disposition that is permanent, and imparts means and facility to produce certain acts whenever it is desired. *Habitus est quo quis utitur cum voluerit* (St Thomas, I-II, q. 30, a. 5). Therefore it is of the easy and sweet kind of contemplation that Suarez here speaks.

[2] That which Suarez teaches elsewhere corroborates what he is saying here. He declares, in fact (*De gratia,* l. VI, ch. x), that with souls truly submissive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit this divine Spirit acts in an habitual manner. He constantly moves these souls in such a way that with them the acts that should be made are performed by the exercise of his gifts, while the less faithful souls act by the

plete repose of the mind without the production of any act either of the understanding or the will? Evidently not, although certain mystics have said otherwise. Even should anyone be content to remain in the presence of God, he could not suspend his powers in such a way as not to think, for example, on the greatness or the goodness of God, nor without experiencing feelings of respect and love.

369 (ch. xiii). Can prayer be made by the will alone, without the understanding taking part? No, because it is impossible for the will to act without knowledge of what it seeks, without being aware of what it wishes (*nil volitum, nisi praecognitum*). But when contemplation has been obtained, that which is then sought is, not to know God better, but to be more intimately united to him by charity, and consequently by acts of the will. However, these feelings of love, and the spiritual sweetness which accompanies them, produce in the mind a more intimate knowledge, and, in a certain manner, a clearer sight of the truth contemplated by the understanding; and the soul enjoys this loving knowledge without distraction of the mind and without solicitude. Thus love is the completion and perfection of contemplation.

370 (ch. xiv). Can contemplation be perfect enough to exclude the operation of the senses? Let us remember that there are two sorts of senses—the interior sense (the imagination) and the exterior senses. These latter can receive nothing without the interior sense. Open your eyes and look at some object. If the imagination is elsewhere you will see nothing. The interior sense, on the contrary, can quite well exercise its activity without the co-operation of the external senses.

This settled, we affirm that it is not possible for anyone with the help of ordinary grace to contemplate with the understanding only to the exclusion of the imagination. The nature of man does not allow of ideas free from sensible forms.[1] Thus St Thomas has said: "The illumination of divine light does not act in the present life without the help of phantasms." This is the teaching of

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exercise of virtues. If these gifts are exercised thus constantly, it follows that contemplation, which is the natural effect of the gifts of wisdom and understanding, is habitual in perfect souls.

[1] Thus we cannot think without explaining our thoughts to ourselves by words. Now, what else is a word but the sensible form of an idea? The operation of the understanding, which perceives the idea, does not act, therefore, without the co-operation of the imagination, which formulates the words. Purely intellectual operations belong to the angelic nature and to disembodied souls.

St Dionysius, of St Gregory Nazianzen; in fine, it is the *common doctrine.*[1]

Nevertheless, all theologians recognize that there is no impossibility in this—that the mind of man can be raised even in this life to the kind of contemplation in which the truth is grasped without any concurrence of the senses (the contemplation resembling that of the angels[2]); but this favour is *very rarely* accorded, for God does not work *miracles* without serious reason. *Such a grace is neither to be asked nor desired;* whoever entertains the desire gives evidence of vanity and pride, and will lay himself open to dangerous illusions.

But if, in contemplation, the interior sense cannot cease acting without a miracle, the same cannot be said of the exterior senses. It can easily happen that a soul faithful to grace can become so wrapped up in divine things as to notice nothing of what is passing around.

371. (ch. xv). Can contemplation not only prevent the exterior senses acting, but so absorb them that they can no longer be roused by exterior objects? It is in this that ecstasy consists.

First, let us say that this is unnecessary, even in the highest contemplation, which can be accompanied by sensible perception, as the example of our Lord proves, who even united the intuitive vision with the operation of the senses; and this will be the state of the elect after the general resurrection. However, perfect contemplation may also by itself, without the special intervention of God, suspend the operation of the senses. In fact, as the powers of the soul are limited, if so completely captivated by the operations of the superior part and of the interior sense, as to be unable to give itself to the acts of the exterior faculties, then the contemplation of divine truths will render it incapable of seeing or hearing that which is taking place

[1] It has been seen above (No. 207) that Blessed Albert the Great teaches exactly the same doctrine. St Teresa, in the book of her *Life* (ch. xxvii), describing a phenomenon of the angelic order, the intellectual vision, protests strongly that it is of an order quite different from that of mystical states. St John of the Cross distinguishes with care (*Ascent* II, 9) the purely spiritual phenomena from the indistinct knowledge obtained by faith and which produces contemplation. He treats separately, first of this and afterwards of others; *now*, he says, I will treat of the four ways of knowing that are *purely spiritual* (*Ascent,* II, 2). Fr. de la Puente distinguishes no less exactly the contemplation of intellectual visions (*infra,* No. 383), etc. Indeed, to receive the loving knowledge of God, which is the fundamental element of contemplation, it is not necessary to be raised to the rank of the angels, and to act like pure spirits without the concurrence of the brain (*vide supra,* No. 335, note).

[2] This is explained at greater length in *Les Faits Extraordinaires.*

around it. This happens too often to make any miraculous effect observable in it.[1]

But in order that the soul should become absorbed in this manner, God must have, by a very particular favour, filled the soul with light. It would be a vain and foolish presumption to imagine it possible by personal efforts to place oneself in a state of ecstasy (ch. xix, No. 25). As to the light which causes this rapture, it is not necessarily given suddenly; it can come gradually and increase by degrees. Some contemplative, applying himself to holy thoughts, feels himself inflamed with love, and in return this burning love produces a yet more perfect contemplation, and then little by little the soul becomes altogether captivated and enraptured (ch. xix, No. 26).

It is not beyond the power of the devil to produce this absorption of the senses. He can, in fact, act in such a way on the imagination as to render the soul inaccessible to exterior things (ch. xv, No. 6).

372. (ch. xviii). In contemplation, what part is taken by the sensitive appetite?

Far from being bound or benumbed, it retains, on the contrary, its action, and participates in the joys of the superior appetite.[2] Nevertheless, these sensible emotions which contemplation naturally produces may be wanting without contemplation ceasing to exist, either because the disposition of the body is opposed to them, or because God, for reasons easy to understand, deprives the soul of inferior pleasures.

3. *The Venerable Luis de la Puente.*

373. Fr. L. de la Puente (1554-1624) is one of the most justly celebrated writers of the Society of Jesus. Being a disciple of Fr. Balthazar Alvarez, he so well imitated the example of his saintly master that, directly after his death, the process of his beatification was introduced, and Pope Clement XIII published the decree of the heroism of his virtues (July 16, 1759).

374. The Venerable Fr. de la Puente said of his work *The Spiritual Guide*,[3] which appeared in 1609: "This is an abridgement of everything relating to the spiritual

[1] Suarez had this experience. From his affirmation and certain passages of other authors (St John of the Cross, *Canticle*, XIII, *Night*, II).

[2] I have explained in the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life* (bk. III, ch. i, § 2) the connection between the two appetitive faculties, and the part taken by the inferior appetite in acts of devotion.

[3] The edition of 1863 changed this title from the feminine to the masculine (*La Guide Spirituelle* into *Le Guide Spirituel*).

life. They who are beginning can learn therein to know themselves, to reform themselves, and to conquer their passions; those who are advancing may learn to imitate the virtues of our Lord and the saints; finally, souls arrived at perfection will find therein mystical science, which leads to contemplation and union with God" (Preface).

This divine union is usually acquired by six excellent acts practised in prayer. These are: The remembrance of the Majesty of that God to whom we speak; the care we ought to take to purify our intention; considering God alone, and seeking only to please him; the reflections and acts of the understanding; the affections of the heart; petitions and colloquies; and, in fine, following these five steps made in prayer is another degree to which we may be raised by our Lord, which is the union of quiet and close familiarity with God (*First Treatise*, ch. i).

375. This end is not attained without many combats—combats against the devils, combats against our own evil inclinations; but the most obstinate enemy and the most difficult to conquer is the bent we have to vain thoughts and imaginations of every kind.

Many, from want of experience, despair of coming off victorious from this combat. "Cassian, when yet a novice in the spiritual life, was much tempted in this matter, but a holy abbot undeceived him by this comparison: If you were to ask a man who could not swim, and had never seen anyone else swim, 'Do you think that a human body which is so heavy can keep itself on the surface of the water?' he would doubtless answer that it would be impossible because he had never seen nor experienced such a thing. But if this man were to see someone swimming, and noticed how cleverly he went through the water without sinking, he would avow his mistake and at once change his mind. It is the same with those who are beginning the practice of prayer. The trouble that their imagination gives them at first makes them despair, and they foolishly persuade themselves that it is an incurable evil. This false judgement comes of their want of experience, for, if they were to consult the more experienced, they would learn that many have obtained that peace and repose of spirit which they desire, and that, by the grace of God, they have no less command over their thoughts than had the centurion over the soldiers of his company" (ch. iii, § 5).

"But in order to attain to this," remarked later the Venerable Luis de la Puente (ch. iv, § 3), "it is necessary to fight without ceasing; if we do not make every effort

during the whole day to repulse the enemy, we cannot expect to be able to defend ourselves during prayer."

376. "No one need despair of obtaining from God the gift of prayer (*ibid.*, § 1). The true spirit of prayer is none other than the supernatural habit of virtue which, united to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and strengthened by those ordinary graces which we receive from heaven, helps us to pray whenever we desire to do so."

"It is true that there is another spirit of prayer, more important, which adds to the ordinary prayer a great abundance of light and of heavenly inspirations; it is the work of the Spirit of God renewing frequently within us this holy operation. He himself calls us and admonishes us to place ourselves in his presence, suggesting what we should say to him, encouraging us to ask for what we want, and giving us feelings of respect and of the confidence with which we should appear before him; and in this way our prayer becomes entirely spiritual, like the Spirit from whom it proceeds. This spirit of prayer, as St Laurence Justinian remarks, is not communicated to everyone; all are not raised so high, nor enjoy such a close familiarity with God. Usually this is their own fault, because they do not profit by this gift which is the common property of all. And, as God is not miserly with his gifts, no one need be timid about asking for them, but may aspire to receive them in the eminent degree in which he loves to communicate them.[1]

377. "There are, however, three different classes of persons to whom God accords this gift with special pleasure. The first is of those whom he destines to a high degree of sanctity in his church, or who are intended for guides and instructors of their brethren. . . .

"The second is of religious, or those who have given up everything for God and maintain intimate intercourse with him; for St Thomas says it is a great sign of the love of God to give up everything in order to apply oneself to divine contemplation and to the prayer of quiet which unites us to God, and which, according to Cassian, is the aim of religious practices.

"The last is of persons tried by all kinds of labour and by grievous afflictions; by this gift God strengthens them and rewards their patience. . . . Finally, as this very special gift is as a grace *gratis data*,[2] our Lord gives it to whom

[1] This passage has been omitted in the translation of Fr. Brignon (1689), and has not been replaced by Fr. Gaydou in the edition of 1863.

[2] Have we not here a slight concession made to those of his colleagues who had attacked the doctrine of Fr. Balthazar Alvarez? St John of

he pleases and as he pleases, to show forth the treasures of his inexpressible charity, and to prove by the goodness he exercises towards his friends on earth what gifts he reserves for them in heaven."

378. *Third Treatise: Concerning Perfect Contemplation and Union with God.*—"This treatise is principally suitable, as its title indicates, to those whom our Lord has already deigned to raise, or who are called by him, to a contemplative and unitive life. . . . All do not arrive at this height in the same manner; some succeed with facility and flying like the birds; others cannot attain it without trouble, dragging themselves along like lizards. . . . Some, by a particular grace, and taught by God only, without any help from man, find themselves, like St Paul, raised to the third heaven; but this is an extraordinary favour and very rare. The ordinary rule is that this perfect state is attained by three means, the first of which is an interior light—the intimate teaching given to us by God; the second is the teaching of some experienced master, together with the reading of books which treat of mystical science; finally, the third is our own industry and the care we take not to be wanting in any duty that depends upon us . . ." (*Introduction to the Third Treatise*).

379. The happiness of this life depends on the perfect contemplation of God and union with him . . . (ch. i). This is the promised land (*ibid.*, § 2) which we ought to desire here, and it is at the same time an image of the promised land to come, the abode of eternal bliss. "To excite in our souls a more earnest desire to possess this promised land of contemplation, we should, like Moses, send forerunners to reconnoitre and to enjoy the delights of it. These forerunners are the first practices of the contemplative life, for, by making reflections while reading or meditating on holy things, a high estimation is formed, not only of the good derived from contemplation and an intimate union with God, but some foretaste of it is felt and obtained in suppliant prayer (ch. ii).

"Of the explorers sent by Moses to the promised land, ten lost all hope of conquering it, and died without

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the Cross declares (*Ascent* iii, 29) that the graces *gratis datae* must not be confounded with contemplative graces. St Thomas does not rank contemplation among the graces *gratis datae,* and with reason, for it is not given to be useful to others, but for the sanctification of him who receives it. It is gratuitous without doubt in the sense that God is master of his gifts; however, he takes into account the dispositions of his servants, for has not our author just said: "If we do not receive this gift, usually it is our own fault"?

having again entered it. Only two remained firm and enjoyed the happiness lost by the others. This is a salutary lesson, for when anyone, by faith and meditation, has experienced somewhat of that sweetness bestowed by God on those who give themselves to prayer and contemplation, he should never lose courage nor cease to hope that he will come to enjoy it in its full perfection" (ch. ii).

380. But if one should never get discouraged, neither ought one to give way to presumption and imagine that it is possible to arrive at contemplation by one's own power and without having laboured beforehand. If one cannot even make a meditation when he pleases without the special help of God, with how much more reason will contemplation, which is a more perfect exercise, require a much greater light and a special vocation, *that is to say, an interior call of grace*,[1] which brings with it also all the helps necessary to insure success.

However, we must not forget that this divine vocation does not accomplish its work at one stroke; it operates gradually and by degrees; it keeps us back for a certain time in the practice of reading and meditation, and we have to prove our constancy until we shall have merited to be called to the more hidden exercises of contemplation and of union with God. This is what made St Bernard say that if one have not previously practised prayer the gift of contemplation is rarely obtained, or if it be, it is a real miracle (ch. ii, § 1).

381. "According to St Thomas, contemplation has God for its principal object, and consists in a tranquil, quiet, loving perception of the eternal truth, which is considered with admiration and love, in a very simple manner, without either reasonings or reflections" (ch. iii).

Contemplation has four qualities: it enlightens the soul by making visible as in broad daylight the eternal truths; it suspends the faculties in such a way as to make the soul forget all earthly things as if they had no existence. Sometimes, however, the understanding and the will cleave to God, while the imagination is occupied with other objects; and at other times the imagination also is captivated; in fine, every sense may become enraptured, and then the suspension becomes ecstasy. If the imagination

[1] *Especial vocacion o llamamiento interior.* It seems, indeed, that in this passage the venerable author, like all the mystics, teaches that no one should intrude himself into contemplative prayer without having received the interior call of grace. It would be contrary to the traditional doctrine if he were to say that among souls given to prayer some, no matter what they did, were predestined to meditation and others to contemplation.

do not participate in contemplation, then it does not last long. This is why ordinary contemplation is made at intervals, and as if repeated over and over again. The third quality of contemplation is an admiration produced by the novelty and excellence of the divine things discerned, and, finally, from this knowledge of divine things, and of the love which ensues, results an ineffable peace (ch. iii, § 2).

382. Such is contemplation. There are many ways by which it may be attained. Some make use of creatures as stepping-stones to lead them to a closer union with their Creator; others, considering the dealings of God with these same creatures, or else, examining thoroughly the meaning of the names by which he describes himself, acquire a higher knowledge of the Divinity. There are those who, finding this way too long, take a short cut; they pray with great fervour and never cease sighing for the grace of perfect contemplation until at last they obtain it. Others apply themselves to develop the virtues of faith and charity by making acts and performing good works to that end. Some are led by extraordinary ways, and have but to follow the inspirations of the divine Spirit who conducts them. Finally, others by their own experience acquire an experimental knowledge of God and rise to a higher contemplation and admiration of his divinity. That which we have to do is to beg of our Lord, who is the way, the truth, and the life, to put us in the way which best suits us, in which he will deign to bestow light to contemplate the eternal truth and a holy ardour of love for it (ch. iv).

383. These, then, are the usual ways by which God manifests himself to his friends and discloses to them his infinite Majesty; but he also occasionally has recourse to extraordinary methods which are of three kinds of vision—those seen with the eyes of the body, the visions of the imagination, and those of the intellect (ch. viii).

This extraordinary contemplation has for aim, like ordinary contemplation, the enlightenment of the soul and the production of that union with God by knowledge and love which properly belongs to the unitive life (ch. ix).

4. *St Francis de Sales and St Jane de Chantal.*

384. The whole substance of mystical science may be found in the *Treatise on the Love of God* by St Francis de Sales (1567-1622). Should the reader peruse again this admirable work, he will see that the doctrine of the holy bishop is similar to that of the great masters who pre-

ceded him, and by whom he was manifestly inspired, and by comparing them he will be enabled the better to understand and to enjoy it. It will suffice to give here a general idea of its scope—necessarily short—for this work is in everyone's hands.

385. Perfection consists in charity. God conducts the soul by degrees to this end by strengthening faith (l. II, ch. xiv) and hope (ch. xv-xvii) and by inspiring a spirit of penance (ch. xviii and following). "See, then, how God conducts the soul, making it progress, until in his ineffable charity he has brought it out of the Egypt of sin into ever-higher degrees of love, even to the promised land; I mean that of perfect charity" (ch. xxii).

Thus does charity grow, thanks to the help that God constantly bestows on faithful souls (l. III, chs. i-iv). It leads to union (l. I, ch. ix), to such an intimate union that it cannot be completely realized here on earth (l. III, ch. vi).

Nevertheless, this union of love begins here in the loving consciousness of the soul that loves (l. VI and VII) and by a perfect conformity of the will with the will of God (l. VIII-IX). Union is affective and at the same time effective; the first is chiefly exercised in prayer, and the last in action.

386. Prayer begins with meditation (l. VI, ch. ii), the end of which is to excite the will to divine love; then when divine love has been developed in the heart it produces contemplation. "We meditate in order to obtain the love of God, but, having obtained it, we contemplate God and his goodness attentively on account of the sweetness that love enables us to find in him. The desire of obtaining the divine love makes us meditate, and the love obtained makes us contemplate, because love makes us find such sweetness in the object beloved that our minds are never satisfied with looking at it and thinking of it. . . . In short, meditation is the mother of love, and contemplation is the daughter" (ch. iii). St Francis de Sales speaks admirably of contemplative prayer—first of that which is the result of ardent love, "the goal and end to which all other practices tend" (l. VI, ch. iii and following); then further on he speaks of extraordinary contemplation (l. VII, ch. iv). And by this he would signify ecstatic contemplation.

387. Although, in the opinion of the holy doctor, contemplation is the natural fruit of perfect love, it does not follow that it would be the result of the personal efforts only of the one who loves; on the contrary, he must receive from God the grace to contemplate. *St Francis de Sales lays down this rule even for that loving recollec-*

tion which is the entrance to and the beginning of the contemplative life.

"This recollection we cannot achieve by choice ourselves, inasmuch as we have no power to have it whenever we please, neither does it depend on our own efforts, but is effected in us by God when he pleases, by his very holy grace" (l. VI, ch. vii).

388. These contemplative graces are usually bestowed on souls who have renounced all other love for the love of their God; and as long as they have not made this entire renunciation they only receive this favour at long intervals. "There are souls who, having already made some progress in divine love, and having retrenched whatever affection they had for dangerous things, yet still entertain dangerous and superfluous affections, because to those things that God wills them to love they attach themselves with excess and with too tender and passionate a love. . . . These souls, therefore, love ardently and superfluously, but they do not love superfluous things, but only what they ought to love; and on this account they enjoy the nuptial bed of the heavenly Solomon—that is to say, the union of recollection and loving repose of which the fifth and sixth books speak—but they do not enjoy it in the character of spouses, because the excess of love they entertain for things good in themselves prevents them entering often into these divine unions with the Spouse, occupied as they are and taken up with a love, far from him and without him, for things that they ought only to love in him and for him." As for the souls "who love neither superfluous things nor superfluously, but love only what God wills, and as he wills . . . having such an intimate union with the Spouse, they truly merit to share his rank and to be queens, even as he is King, since they are devoted individually to him without division or any separation" (l. X, chs. iv and v).

Does this mean that they will always have the *delights* of contemplation? This is not what St Francis de Sales thought, for in this sixth book, to which he just referred us, he teaches that there is an excellent contemplation, although dry and without sweetness, "the faculties of the soul never having any comfort except that of being without comfort, nor even the will except in its highest point, wherein it is content to have no comfort except the satisfaction and good pleasure of God, in which it rests" (ch. xi[1]).

[1] A passage in the *Conference* (*Entretiens* III, on Confidence) can be brought in support, where the saint says to his daughters of the Visita-

388 *a*. St Francis de Sales, therefore, has pointed out with precision this dry contemplation, which St John of the Cross[1] describes at the same epoch. He had before him a striking example in St Jane Frances de Chantal, who was so often in this state, and who has given advice full of wisdom on this subject.

"The counsels she received from St Francis de Sales (see *Degrees*, t. ii, No. 165) had so greatly strengthened her in her progress," relates Mother de Chaugy, "that she became immovable . . . and when she desired to do anything to please herself love reproved her, as we have seen written by her own hand: 'Coming from Communion, and being desirous of making more specific acts than those of a simple attention and complete surrender and annihilation before God, his goodness rebuked me and made me understand that it was only from self-love that these acts would be made, and that they would do as much harm to my soul as would be done to a weak and delicate person by awakening her out of her first sleep, which she could not resume at pleasure. . . .' That which helped her somewhat was that she knew by a science that experience in the guidance of souls had taught her that this destitution of feeling in Mary's life of holy inactivity is worth more than all Martha's cares, and is a trial that love exacts from the loving soul; and that in this way it will arrive at perfect abnegation, poverty of spirit, patience, and resignation, and that it is thus that it is led to the death of self-love and to the complete neglect of self-interest" (*Life*, by Mother de Chaugy, pp. 502-505).

Personal experience of this state rendered more valuable the advice she gave to her daughters.

"Those who suffer from aridity can make all the acts of prayer. Even if it be without pleasure or feeling, it will not be without profit and usefulness, for the gold of patience, of submission, and abandonment to the good

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tion that there are people very perfect to whom God refuses sweetness in prayer, but the passage we have just quoted will suffice. However, there is besides a passage taken from the *Treatise on the Love of God*, so well written by the holy doctor, in which he renders his thought with greater certainty than in a Conference pronounced without doctrinal pretension, and reproduced from memory by the Sisters to whom it was addressed.

[1] St John of the Cross wrote his works before St Francis had composed (in 1616) his *Treatise on the Love of God*, but they were not published till later, the original in 1618, and the French translation in 1621. The two saints could not, therefore, have influenced each other, and it is all the more remarkable that both at the same period should have spoken of dry contemplation more distinctly than anyone had done before. Tauler, however, had described it by the name of naked faith.

pleasure of God that they ought to practise on this occasion will be more pleasing to his divine Majesty than if they should be dissolved in sweetness. They should persevere in remaining in the presence of God with a profound respect and in a devout attitude, lovingly suffering this trial. For it is true that when these aridities and the impossibility of acting are great, the poor soul in this state of weakness can do nothing but suffer. But this simple suffering is a prayer very pleasing to God, being accompanied by humility, submission, and confidence, being content with his will and with the honour of remaining in his all-holy presence, either as a slave before her Lord, or as a beggar before her wealthy Sovereign, as one who is powerless in the presence of the Omnipotent, or a disciple in the company of her good Master, as a bride with her bridegroom, a daughter at the feet of her Father, and any such feelings as the Holy Spirit suggests, from time to time saying a few words to our Lord suitable to the state in which she finds herself. And I am sure that these, being uttered with loving submission, will be profitable, even if said without any pleasure. . . . I must repeat this: that it *often* happens that those in this state (of simplicity and trust in God) are troubled with many distractions and remain without any sensible support, our Lord having withdrawn the feeling of his most sweet presence and of every kind of help and interior light, so that they remain in a state of total powerlessness and without feeling. This rather surprises those who are not as yet greatly experienced. However, they ought to keep steadfast and to rest in God above all sight and feeling, suffering, receiving, and embracing equally everything that God is pleased to perform in them, sacrificing and abandoning themselves unreservedly to the mercy of his love and all-holy will, without seeing or wishing to see what they have done or should do, so that in all their ways and the knowledge they possess they should unite themselves to God with the highest point of their souls, and lose themselves in him, finding by this means peace in the midst of war and rest during work. . . . In short, we must be content to remain in the state in which we are placed by God, and be patient in pain, and suffer uncomplainingly. . . . Blessed are those who persevere in this holy practice, notwithstanding every difficulty, for it is by this that they will receive the bread which will be their nourishment for eternal life" (*Réponses de Sainte Jeanne de Chantal*, art.: "Retraites, avis pour l'oraison").

5. *The mystical theologians of the seventeenth century.*

389. During the course of the seventeenth century there appeared some theologians who acquired great notoriety for their treatises on mystical theology—John of Jesus-Mary, Le Gaudier, Alvarez de Paz, Bona, authors of considerable merit who really appear to have had an experimental knowledge of the states they described. Philip of the Blessed Trinity, Vallgornera, Brancati de Laurea also had a great influence, and for this reason should find a place in this brief account of the history of mysticism.

John of Jesus-Mary.

389 *a*. This reverend author (1564-1615), who was a friend of Bellarmine and had a great reputation for sanctity,[1] entered the Order of Barefooted Carmelites in the year when St Teresa died (1582). He represents the most ancient tradition of his Order.

In his *Schola Orationis* (published in Rome, 1610), he reproduces the classic distinction between the three states or degrees of charity—those of beginners, of the advancing, and the perfect—and he repeats after St Thomas that the perfect are those whose principal study is to become united to God and to enjoy him; therefore the most suitable practice for these is that of contemplation of the Divinity. Treating, then, of contemplation, he contrasts it with meditation. Meditation is the way, and contemplation is the end to which meditation and all prayer tend. We cannot produce contemplation by our own efforts; it is put into our souls by a special grace of God.

He then shows that contemplation is the effect of the gift of wisdom. This gift communicates to the soul a pure, lofty, and very peaceful knowledge of the perfections of God. He who possesses this knowledge considers these perfections with love, for he possesses in his will a quite divine charity, inflamed and increased by this knowledge.

"How is it that every soul in a state of grace possessing the gift of wisdom has not also the gift of contemplation?"[2] asks this revered author. "There may be many

[1] Fr. Mary-Joseph of the Sacred Heart, in an article published in the *Etudes carmelitaines,* says that the body of this holy religious, although it had been at first buried in a very damp place, has remained entirely incorrupt to the present time.

[2] Fr. Lallemant puts forward the same objection (IV *Pr.,* ch. iii, a. 3); he makes the same reply to it, which also experience proves to be the correct one.

reasons for this. First, the want of care to lead a pure life, the number of venial sins committed by the soul, and too many occupations; the worry of business; too little appreciation for divine communications, and many other obstacles of a like nature. The gift of wisdom, as also the other gifts of the Holy Ghost, serve for the faithful as far as is necessary for their salvation when it is required to form a just judgement on divine things, or to decide on the course of conduct to pursue in human affairs; but there are very few who keep guard over their minds perfectly enough to make full use of this gift of wisdom, and to arrive at the said contemplation, and enjoy those very sweet communications with God which are like a foretaste of the happiness of heaven. The number of those who attain lower degrees of contemplation is much greater.

"What is the ordinary way that leads to contemplation? It is this same practice of prayer, and he who desires to possess this jewel of contemplation should apply himself as much as possible to prayer, lead a humble and mortified life, abstaining from everything that might be an obstacle to interior peace and to divine communications. This doctrine should strongly fortify and impel men and lead them to the practice of a generous mortification, and to spare no pains to arrive at even the lowest degree of contemplation; not so much to enjoy its consolations as to attain perfection, and to give God the joy which is so agreeable to him, of uniting men closely to himself, and of communicating himself intimately to them."

The venerable author gives the same doctrine in his *Mystica Theologia;* there also he shows that meditation and prayer lead to contemplation,[1] but that the latter is as far from meditation as midday is from dawn. He shows clearly then that meditation is a prayer acquired by the efforts of the soul, and that contemplation is a gift of God. In fact, he says: "Meditation is like a ship navigated with much anxiety through many tempests, but contemplation is the sheltered and peaceful harbour. The most merciful God, looking at his children, who are tired of labouring at the oars, with paternal love is pleased to take them into the peaceful port of contemplation.

"Some philosophers, carried away by an ardent devotion to science, after having sought eagerly for the truth, when they at last find it, their minds become calm and peaceful while they happily consider the truth they have

[1] I have quoted elsewhere (*Mystical State,* ch. xii) that passage in which the saintly religious teaches that the unitive way corresponds to the contemplative life.

discovered. This is natural contemplation, in no way to be compared to divine contemplation."

He proceeds to describe this divine contemplation, and there also he says that it is produced by the gift of wisdom, which imparts the property of contemplating God lovingly with sweetness in the will. He then shows that this supposes a free intelligence for the renunciation of all that might trouble the peace of the soul, such as a multiplicity of affairs, intercourse with the world, cares, scruples, and, in general, all that weighs on the human heart and hardens it. "Therefore, until our hearts, strengthened by progress in virtue, can live free among the dead—that is to say, until they are able, even in the midst of affairs, to persevere in contemplation—we who desire to enjoy this true liberty ought to abstain from anything that might take possession of the smallest portion of our hearts, so that our minds, becoming attached only to God, may receive the rays of the divine light."

6. *Le Gaudier.*

390. Le Gaudier, a French Jesuit who died in 1622, was the author of an excellent treatise on spirituality. After treating first of the three degrees of perfection—that of beginners, of the more advanced, and of the perfect—he goes on to describe the state of the perfect (Section III, *De tertio statu*).

He who by a special grace of God has been called from the darkness of sin to the light of justice, first enters the narrow path of the purgative way, then in the midst of an ever-increasing heavenly light makes his way through the vast region of virtues, and at last arrives at the full splendour of midday. . . . Although the dawn and the beginning of the day are already pleasurable, nevertheless the perfect day has a greater charm, for in it the soul enjoys tranquillity, purity, warmth, and fruitfulness, and finds perfect rest. Our Lord never ceases to urge on his servants who are still in the second degree, and to inspire them with a desire to attain perfection. Usually he raises to this higher degree those who have laboured painfully and for a long time to sanctify themselves. He gives them power to practise the acts of contemplation sweetly and familiarly, and communicates to them a greater degree of sanctity. . . .

It is God himself, the Sun of justice, who produces the perfect day by placing a certain divine light in the understanding and a divine fervour in the will. The acts practised in this state are so perfectly purified from every

stain, they attain to, embrace, and grasp God so purely, they so unite him to the souls producing them, that they become one spirit with God and live an entirely divine life, while, on his side, God, who dwells in them, who fills them completely, entirely pervades them with his divine perfections and brilliant illuminations, and himself performs the works they undertake. These works, proceeding as they do from a love of God both contemplative and practical, are no longer accomplished painfully; they flow from the action of God as their source, and he makes them proceed with facility, with pleasure, with abundance, and fills the whole life of the faithful souls with these excellent acts. Thus for those who have arrived at this state, all their perfection and happiness in this life greatly resemble the state of future beatitude; in fact, the perfection of the happiness of eternal life consists in two things—the blessed see God, whom they love, and who is intimately present with them, and he allows himself to be their own possession. Therefore by this vision, and the acts appropriate to this heavenly life, they add to the glory of God; thus the perfection of the present life, it is needless to say, requires that souls remain in the presence of God, enjoying this divine presence, and also that they should produce works worthy of the attention of God and which redound to his glory. The faithful, therefore, having become completely purified, see God everywhere present by their affective and contemplative love. This is quite easy to them, for, having removed all obstacles, they not only become upright and well regulated, but adorned with solid virtue, and very few incentives to distraction remain in them, and hardly anything which could prevent their union with God—neither unruly affections, nor desires for temporal things, nor exterior cares, nor vain thoughts, nor dangerous occasions; and the two powers of understanding and will having obtained complete mastery over themselves and their acts, having broken the ties of natural affections, are spontaneously impelled towards God, and with the greatest ease, familiarity, and intimacy they draw near to him, embrace him, and in a certain way hold him, and this not in a transient manner, but almost continuously, and as much as is possible in this life.

It is contemplation which is proper to this state that produces these happy effects.

The principal object of contemplation can be no other than God, his presence and attributes, and, secondly, his works and benefits. On the part of the understanding, contemplation consists in a pause, during

which, all reasoning having ceased, it concentrates on the supreme truth, which in itself is very simple. Although this act is indistinct and is very inferior to the beatific vision, nevertheless it contains all the power of the understanding and all the light which has been imparted to it, whether natural or supernatural; therefore, discarding the multiplied acts usual to it and the shackles of long reasonings, the understanding considers the eternal truths, fathoms them more profoundly than can be explained, is nourished by them, and in this way is rendered perfect. So, when we consider first principles, we behold them with conviction and distinctly without the roundabout ways of reasoning, arriving quickly at the conclusion by a simple glance. All reasoning, however, is not excluded. Certain reflections precede the act of contemplation, and are sometimes the cause or occasion of it; but more often they are not by any means the cause, for when, by an act of faith, which is frequently a true contemplation, we consider a revealed truth, no reasoning can be the cause of this act of faith; it does not bring about the glance of contemplation, but induces us to accept this truth with the utmost respect and faith. From this it follows that this same act of faith, thanks to a light coming in some way from without, but, above all, thanks to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, becomes more clear, more certain, and therefore merits to be called a contemplative glance, a vision. It is otherwise when we deduce theological conclusions therefrom, and when we then remain in consideration of the truths thus deduced. In this case contemplation is, indeed, produced by reasoning. (This is evidently a learned contemplation and not contemplative prayer).

In the practice of contemplation the will does not remain idle; on the contrary, it takes a prominent part, because many acts of this power occur. The first is an act of the virtue of piety, by which the soul is carried towards God with great fervour, as to its only good and final end. But this act of piety, although very useful in contemplation, does not constitute its essence; love must become part of it, for, as St Thomas declares, true contemplation always proceeds from charity; charity inclines us to place ourselves in the presence of God and to unite ourselves to him, and this is effected by contemplation. This is why St Augustine assures us that contemplation is better than all the merits of our mortifications and every exercise of virtue. Also the acts of charity made in contemplation rank much higher than the contemplative gaze.

However clear may be the sight of our understanding, nevertheless it is extremely obscure and imperfect, for it depends on phantasms; however, even in this life acts of love can be very pure and sincere.

Following the acts of religion and of love are three other acts which, although not of the essence of contemplation, have to do with it and greatly perfect it.

The first is an act of admiration full of respect. . . . In the second place, from this respectful admiration of the divine Majesty and of the love of God springs a feeling of devotion. This devotion is nothing else than a firm purpose of being entirely devoted to the service of God. This will to serve God in the first and second states—of beginners and of the advancing—hardly ever procures pure and calm satisfaction on account of the resistance of nature, the inclinations of which are not entirely overcome. In the third state, on the contrary, devotion becomes something real and substantial, and is usually joined to an unspeakable happiness, to a kind of possession of God which is the effect of perfect acts of love and of true devotion, and is the almost inseparable accompaniment of contemplation. In fact, contemplation produces four kinds of happiness—that which results from the knowledge of beautiful and sublime truths, that which produces the love of God, and which can be called the soul of contemplation; there is an incredible joy to see that God, so much beloved, is the possessor of such great riches. The third happiness belongs, not to charity, but to hope; it proceeds from the sight of the benefits of God and of his bounty towards us; and, finally, the last happiness is this—to give oneself entirely to God and to be immolated for his glory.

The efficient cause of contemplation is God and man; in such a way, however, that God does nearly all and man so little as to seem almost passive. God habitually bestows this gift in an eminent degree on those whom he destines to do great things for his glory, if they acquit themselves well of the duties of the first and second states. However, there is no one to whom God will not communicate this gift according to the state in which he is, if he correspond fully with the divine vocation. For although there are many who, by reason of a restless nature, seem incapable of contemplation, divine grace is so powerful that it raises even these, if they be not wanting on their part, at least at opportune moments, to the highest contemplation . . . through the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Fr. Le Gaudier then shows how contemplation is the

characteristic of the third state, which is that of the perfect. It may be found transiently and *per accidens* even before man has arrived so far, but in the third state it is found *per se*, and is more perfect, constant, easy, simple, and efficacious therein.

7. *Alvarez de Paz.*

391. James Alvarez de Paz, a Jesuit residing in Peru, lived at the same epoch. His work appeared at Lima in 1615. It is lengthy and often diffuse, but is, nevertheless, a work of great merit. In the third volume he touches on mystical questions and treats of the contemplative ways.

"Contemplation is the end of meditation, the goal towards which we ought to tend. We are allowed to desire it, to ask God humbly for it, and it is even a duty to dispose ourselves for the reception of it by perfect abnegation and by the assiduous practice of every virtue, and we certainly ought to blame ourselves if we never experience the ineffable sweetness of contemplation. . . . Drive far from you your sins, overcome your self-indulgence, and by your daily life render yourself like unto Christ, and the gift of contemplation will not be refused to you" (*Life*, I, part iii, ch. xxvii).

392. It is not only in this passage that Alvarez de Paz speaks thus. We will quote from a page that has been well translated into French by Canon Lejeune: "The gift of contemplation is, even more than the practice of every virtue, subordinate to the practice of mortification. I will call attention to a phenomenon apparently strange. You meet in religious congregations, among priests as well as the laity, many excellent people who live strictly, abstain from serious sin, practise a certain degree of corporal austerity, and accomplish certain works of mercy. Why is it, then, that so few of them have the gift of prayer, know how to converse with God, not only in words, but in spirit and in truth; in a word, so few who enjoy the light of contemplation? Is our God a severe Master, a tyrant exacting service from men but refusing to allow them to approach him? Certainly not, for he says of himself: 'My delight is to be with the children of men.' . . . Many souls ardently desire the gift of contemplation, yet do not obtain it. Many wish they could fly, but remain on the ground. Many knock at the door, and it is not opened to them. Is this because conversing with God is disagreeable to them? Not at all. 'His conversa-

tion hath no bitterness, nor his company any tediousness, but joy and gladness. . . .' (*Wisd.* viii, 16).

"If the cause of the rarity of contemplation be sought, it is that contemplation exacts the practice of a serious and constant mortification, and as the number of those who renounce themselves for good is very small, not less restricted is the number of those who find their way to the divine cellars, there to drink the wine of heavenly communications" (t. ii, l. II, part i, ch. xi).

393. In these passages, the reader will recognize, Alvarez de Paz is but the echo of the great masters. Can the same be said of another passage, which some put before the rest and quote alone, passing over the former in silence?

"It is not all who are perfect who are called to perfect contemplation, because Almighty God has other ways of making men perfect and saints. There are those whom he moulds in an admirable manner by afflictions, illnesses, temptations, and persecutions; others he forms through the works of the active life and by the ministry of souls exercised with a very pure intention. He conducts others to great sanctity by means of ordinary prayer and mortification in all things. And it happens that someone who is favoured with great gifts of contemplation is found inferior in perfect charity to another who has not received these gifts. There are also perfect souls to whom God refuses this gift because they do not possess a sufficiently calm temperament for contemplation, for God orders all things sweetly (not going against nature). He refuses it to some to enable them to give themselves to the work of converting souls, which extraordinary states of prayer and spiritual transports might prevent, and to some in order to keep them humble, for otherwise they might be inclined to think too highly of themselves; and he refuses it to others in order to accomplish the secret designs of his divine Providence, which it is not given to us to know" (bk. V, part ii, ch. iii).

We cannot subscribe unreservedly to that which Alvarez de Paz here teaches. It seems, in fact, according to the natural meaning of this passage, that the path of contemplation, and the path of afflictions, temptations, and persecutions are two paths quite distinct and incompatible with each other, and that God leads souls to perfection sometimes by the one and sometimes by the other, whereas, according to the masters, it is from the union of these two means that God produces sanctity. Also he makes it appear that the contemplative gifts might prove an

obstacle to the exercise of zeal, whereas it has always been noted that the best apostolic labourers were all great contemplatives.

It is true that Alvarez de Paz speaks here only of perfect contemplation,[1] and it is this that makes his doctrine justifiable. Many souls attain perfection without being favoured with so eminent a degree of contemplation, but it most frequently happens that they are not quite free from contemplation, as we have remarked at the beginning of this book. To the many means pointed out by our author, such as tribulations, temptations, and good works, which are always met with in different degrees in the work of the sanctification of souls, are united—and this also in different degrees—interior graces of light and of love, which are nothing else than contemplative graces.

It is very probable that this is the thought of our author, otherwise there would be undeniable contradictions with the passages cited above, contradictions with the doctrine of the author, who has devoted a considerable portion of his book to explaining how to prepare for contemplation. If contemplation, even in an elementary degree, be often refused to perfect souls; if there be so many other ways of attaining perfection without it, do not say: "These are the means to take, and whoever makes use of them faithfully will obtain this great and salutary favour." In the same chapter from which this passage is taken, Alvarez de Paz again repeats it, and those who try to build upon the few lines just quoted should read to the end of this chapter. After having shown that the imperfect occasionally receive mystical gifts, the author adds:

"But as a general rule it is to the perfect that the gift of contemplation is accorded, to the perfect who, having cast off their vices, subdued their natural affections, acquired virtues, especially that of ardent divine love, enjoy that peace of the soul which enables them to fix their attention on God and to burn like dry wood

[1] Alvarez de Paz points out many times the inferior degrees of contemplation which he calls *contemplatio inchoata*. He rightly declares them to be much more frequent. A contemporary writer has declared that by this *contemplatio inchoata* Alvarez de Paz does not intend mystical contemplation; to prove that this is evidently an error it is only necessary to read ch. xiii. The same author has written that the perfect contemplation of Alvarez de Paz "manifestly coincides with infused contemplation in general." No, Alvarez de Paz did not fall into such an error of judgement; he calls ecstatic contemplation perfect, and that which, without going so far as rapture, suspends the powers, excluding in consequence all distraction and inflames the soul with the most ardent love, *mentis elevationem, SUSPENSIONEM, admirationem et delectationem inducens et ardentissimum amorem accendens* (l. V, § 2, ch. xiii).

with the sweet fire of divine love. The gift of contemplation is, therefore, accorded to the perfect habitually.[1] . . . Lift up your hearts, then, to the heights if you desire the gift of contemplation; make them pure, and adorn them with every virtue, and full of contempt for creatures. Then will God show himself, not only kind to you, but disposed to bestow largess, and to be very prodigal of his gifts. He will enlighten you, he will embrace you, *he will lead you to contemplation;* that is to say, to that kind of prayer in which you will have little else to do than to receive the rain which falls from heaven into your souls."

8. *Cardinal Bona.*

394. The illustrious Cardinal Bona of the Order of Cistercians (1609-1674) has, in his *Via Compendii ad Deum*, given a good explanation of the traditional doctrine. If he does not expatiate at a greater length on contemplation, he says, it is because the sources from which it can be drawn are within the reach of everyone, and he refers to Richard of St Victor, Denis the Carthusian, to James Alvarez, to Fr. Luis de la Puente, to St Teresa, and finally to Suarez, whom he declares to be as well versed in mystical theology as in theology properly so called (*in utraque theologia versatissimum*).

395. In his *Phœnix Rediviva* the beautiful chapter on divine union and how to obtain it can be read (Med. xx).

The principal obstacles to divine union, says he, are: Firstly, sensuality, love of ease, luxury, the satisfaction of nature in food, sleep, and clothing, in conversations and amusements. Even if in all this there be no serious fault, they are defects that make spiritual exercises painful and unattractive. Secondly, presumption and pride in practising corporal austerities, a pride which takes the form of self-satisfaction and a contempt for others. Thirdly, scruples. Fourthly, human respect, which prevents the following of the way of perfection for fear of blame and ridicule. Fifthly, the want of true resignation in ignominy, contempt, and affliction. Sixthly, too great an eagerness and attention to allowable things, which causes distraction and wanderings of the mind during prayer. Seventhly, an excessive curiosity of the mind which wants to examine into and reason about everything.

396. These obstacles removed, souls desirous of arriving at divine union should prepare for it in these different ways: Firstly, by practising virtue and the works of

[1] *Datur itaque contemplationis donum quasi ex habitu perfectis.*

the active life. Secondly, by detachment from creatures. Thirdly, by self-renunciation and self-forgetfulness in order to live in God alone, and this can be obtained by seeking only the glory of God and in always preferring that which makes the soul more like to Jesus Christ, and also that which is most useful to others and most opposed to self-will. Fourthly, by solitude and interior silence, and by faithfully suppressing all images that do not represent the Beloved. Fifthly, by perfect abandonment, which makes one accept from the hand of God with complete indifference trials, humiliations, deprivations, aridities, desolation, and even death itself. Sixthly, souls should not cling to anything, not even to spiritual exercises, except in so far as they agree with the divine good pleasure, in accomplishing which they should do all that depends on themselves, at the same time leaving to God the success of their efforts. Seventhly and finally, they should not consent to any deliberate imperfection, and, as union with God is a gift of great value, faithful souls should ask for it with fervent aspirations and frequent ejaculatory prayer. This practice of ejaculatory prayer raises souls to God so well that it carries them with long strides to the desired union.

397. The pious and learned Cardinal greatly insists on the employment of these aspirations (*Via Compend. ad D.*, chs. v, vi, vii, viii, ix). "This practice," he says, "is, above all, suitable to those whose souls are purified from the habit of sin and who have made some progress in the illuminative way, in the practice of virtue, and of meditation. When these have become, thanks to mental prayer, detached from the things of this world, they begin to feel within themselves the fire of divine love; they leave the state of meditation to enter that of aspiration, and later pass on to that of contemplation and of mystical theology. . . . Such is the doctrine of all the mystics, that to vocal prayer and meditation succeed aspirations which are a more perfect method of prayer, and aspirations lead to infused prayer (of contemplation)."

The reader will have recognized in this prayer of aspirations affective prayer, which holds a middle place between meditation and contemplation. The soul no longer loads itself with long and laborious reasonings, for the heart is more quickly moved to feelings of love and desire. However, it will be necessary to return to this method should it still have an attraction, because the graces bestowed have come by this means. This light shows where to find true happiness, and it makes virtue appreciated, desired, and earnestly implored. With this

ardent desire of Christian virtues are mingled feelings of gratitude to God, from whom the soul has received so much, and of love for Jesus, who has suffered so much for it.

Later, if faithful, the attraction for reasoned considerations and imaginative representations will cease, and greater light will be communicated, which will give higher ideas of God considered in himself, and will enable this soul to produce more perfect acts of love. Then will follow the state of contemplation, or divine union.

9. *Philip of the Holy Trinity.*

398. Philip of the Holy Trinity (1603-1671), Provincial of the Carmelites of the Province of Aquitaine, brought out his *Summa Theologiae Mysticae* in 1656.

By him it was that the distinction between acquired or natural contemplation, and that which is infused or supernatural, was rendered classic; but this distinction has brought great confusion into the mystical doctrine.[1]

He places very high that which he names infused contemplation, and assigns to it characters which mostly belong only to states of contemplation truly extraordinary. Thus he teaches that in infused contemplation there reigns a perpetual uniformity; the soul is drawn away from all that is sensible, the inferior part is as though absorbed, and the peace felt is so complete that the subject is motionless.

On the contrary, acquired contemplation has God for its object, as he manifests himself in his creatures, and its principle is God, inasmuch as he is the author of nature. In this contemplation God only gives his grace when the good but difficult acts in the natural order are impossible to weak and corrupt human nature without the assistance of his grace. The other marks assigned by this author

[1] Bona, who published his *Via Compendii ad Deum* at the same period, probably some years before, had, indeed, spoken of an acquired contemplation in contradistinction to infused contemplation, but without insistence and without attaching any importance to it (ch. x). The contemplation of which he frequently speaks, and which he proposes to the efforts of the faithful soul, is infused contemplation. He only seems to consider in theory, and as a possibility, acquired contemplation.

Thomas of Jesus, in his book *De Contemplatione divina* (l. I, ch. ii, Antwerp, 1620), had already made this distinction, but his explanations are wanting in clearness. He calls acquired contemplation that which is produced by reasonings and discourse, and above it he places supernatural and mystical contemplation, in which the soul, acting in the manner of the angels, takes hold of the truth by a simple apprehension and intuition, in a heavenly way, without reasoning (cf. *The Mystical State*, second edition).

to acquired contemplation suppose it to be obtained solely through reasonings; this is the state of a mind which, by dint of meditation, having nothing more to fathom, ceases to reflect and enjoys the truths it has discovered. This can only belong at most to affective prayer in which one is more occupied in expressing one's feelings than in reasoning, but in which there is no particular light about the divine greatness, a light which goes much further than all reasonings, and is the essential element and foundation of true contemplative prayer.

Therefore, this division is very imperfect because in it there is no place for lower states of contemplative prayer, which are the most usual. It has found favour because, doubtless, it was believed to mark the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary contemplation. If such were the thought of Philip of the Holy Trinity, he drew the line of demarcation very badly, and did not well describe either the one or the other.

Let us repeat that this author is the first to speak of a prayer of active union, and desires to prove the existence of this particular kind of prayer by that passage from St Teresa quoted above (No. 313). However, it is very clear that the saint in this place does not speak of a particular kind of prayer, but of the state of a soul which, without being favoured with the prayer of ecstatic union, has arrived at perfect conformity with the will of God.

10. *Thomas of Vallgornera.*

399. A few years afterwards, in 1662, the Dominican, Thomas of Vallgornera, composed his work on mystical theology. He reproduced almost word for word the chapter in which Philip of the Holy Trinity establishes the difference between acquired and infused contemplation. Following the example of this author, he excludes from acquired contemplation all light other than that obtained by reasoning. Then he comprehends under this denomination all prayer[1] in which the soul applies itself to the consideration of the divine perfections, but in so far as the soul seeks to occupy its thoughts with the divine dignity it does not follow that no light of contemplation is received. Whether in contemplation or not, the perfec-

[1] If we were told that by acquired contemplation Vallgornera does not necessarily designate a state of prayer, but the disposition of mind of one who carefully studies the divine perfections, it becomes still more evident that ordinary contemplative prayer is not described by this learned author.

tions of God can be brought to mind, and he who has not been raised to contemplation can make of them a fruitful meditation, and he who contemplates can thus promote his union with God.

II. *Brancati de Laurea.*

400. Twenty-three years later (1685) Cardinal Brancati de Laurea of the Order of St Francis published his book *On Prayer and its Different Kinds*. He is not a professional; he owns that, to him, contemplation is an unknown country (*Opusc.* VII, *initio*). He repeats the distinction we have noted in the works of Philip of the Holy Trinity, but without being able to describe it in a more felicitous manner. Although acquired contemplation is the main point of his doctrine, he does not know how to explain its nature, as is proved by those strange contradictions that I have criticized elsewhere.[1]

Hardly any of the marks which he ascribes to it go beyond affective prayer, while he speaks of supernatural and infused contemplation as of a very high order of contemplation frequently producing ecstasy, and only accorded to the saints—*paucissimis ac raris ac perfectissimis*.

401. It would appear that, after having placed supernatural contemplation so high—higher than necessary—these authors would have been more consistent with their own teaching had they advised souls not to aspire to it; but the teaching of the masters had been so clear and insistent that they followed it without hesitation, and proclaimed that the desire of contemplation is quite justifiable. "Supernatural contemplation is so great a blessing," says Philip of the Holy Trinity (pars ii, tract. iii, art. 4), "and is in itself so excellent, so profitable, and procures such an excess of joy for those who devote themselves to it, that it would be absolutely ridiculous to assert that those who lead a virtuous life and make progress in the way of perfection are not bound to aspire to it, and to be replenished with the fulness of the delights of the divine Spirit."

Vallgornera maintains the same opinion, which he presents in the following proposition: "Everyone should aim at contemplation." And he devotes five long pages to prove it (Quæst. III, Disp. III, art. 3). As to Brancati

[1] *The Mystical State*, second edition, Append. III. He first denies, then affirms, then again denies that any more than ordinary assistance or any gift of the Holy Spirit would be required for this kind of contemplation.

de Laurea (*Opusc.* VI, cap. xi), he also would prove this thesis, "for," he says, as experience had taught him, "it has been put in doubt by many, whose cowardice, laziness, and love of the world prompt them to impute presumption to those who desire contemplation."

12. *Fr. Lallemant and his disciples.*

402. While these authors were treating of mystical questions according to scholastic forms, others were also handling them in works of a different nature, composed without the equipment of theology. These were FF. Lallemant, Surin, and Rigoleuc of the Society of Jesus.

They were more than theologians; they were men of prayer who could speak of mysticism by experience, especially the two first, who, by the sanctity of their lives and by the excellence of their doctrine, certainly merit to rank among the number of the great masters of the spiritual life.[1]

Fr. Lallemant died in 1635. The instructions he gave to the Fathers of the Society were collected by Fr. Rigoleuc, his worthy disciple, more able than any other to transmit them faithfully. They form a small but very substantial volume, the study of which is necessary to whosoever desires instruction in true spiritual science.[2] I will only give a few brief extracts.

403. God is our end. "In our hearts there is a void that cannot be filled by any creature. It can only be filled by God, who is our first beginning and our last end. In possessing God this void is filled, and we are made happy. The loss of God leaves us empty and renders us miserable" (*First Princ.*, ch. i). "Happiness, even on earth, consists in the possession of God, and the more completely we renounce ourselves in order to unite ourselves to God, the less miserable do we become, and the more happy. But the devil takes advantage of our ignorance and weakness to produce in us errors and constant infirmities, from which we must escape to become capable of the supreme happiness of this life which consists in the vision of God, in rejoicing in the gift of his holy presence, without which

[1] It appears that before the seventeenth century those who wrote on mysticism were always themselves mystics. From that period it is frequently to be observed that matters of high spirituality are treated by authors having no personal experience of mystical states. Such persons might compose good treatises by following good masters and if they thoroughly understood their subject, but they lay themselves open to mistakes.

[2] *Spiritual Teaching* (*La Doctrine Spirituelle*, Paris, Gabalda).

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even the highest seraphim would be unhappy. A soul which ceaselessly contemplates God and is always ready to do his will is happy" (*ibid.*, ch. ii).

404. "When a soul has no affection except for God, and seeks him only, if united to God and enjoying nothing out of him, if, finding no rest except in him alone, nothing can trouble it. Thus the saints, when persecuted by men and beaten by devils, laughed it all to scorn. The blows were only on the surface, and the soul was in peace. Until we have reached this state we shall be miserable."

Now, God only asks to fill the human heart, but this heart must be pure and empty of all human affection.

"The surest and shortest way to perfection is to study to be pure of heart rather than any other practice of virtue, for God is ready to give us every kind of grace provided that we place no impediment in the way. Now, it is by purifying our hearts that we cut off all that prevents the operation of God. In this way, the obstacles being removed, it is impossible to imagine the wonderful operations that God effects in the soul" (*Third Princ.*, ch. i, art. 2).

405. The inspirations of grace becoming more frequent and pressing, the soul, if faithful in following them, will surely attain perfection.

"The two elements of the spiritual life are the purging of the heart and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are the two extremes of all spirituality. By these two paths perfection is arrived at according to the degree of purity acquired, and of fidelity in co-operating with the impulses of the Holy Spirit and in following his guidance.

"All our perfection depends on this fidelity, and it can be said that an epitome of the spiritual life consists in taking notice of the ways and impulses of the Spirit of God in our souls, and in strengthening our will in the resolution to follow them, making use for this purpose of every pious practice, such as prayer, reading, the sacraments, and the habit of virtue and of good works" (*Fourth Princ.*, ch. ii, art. 1).

406. I have quoted in the *Degrees* the passages in which Fr. Lallemant teaches that contemplation is the prayer of the perfect (*Seventh Princ.*, ch. i, art. 2, No. 9, and ch. iv, art. 4, § 2).

I will here reiterate the very correct division he makes between ordinary and extraordinary contemplation.

"We should distinguish two sorts of contemplation, the one ordinary, the other extraordinary. Ordinary contemplation is a supernatural habitual state by which God

raises the powers of the soul to a sublime height of knowledge and enlightenment, to noble inclinations and spiritual tastes, and this is when he no longer discovers in the soul those sins, passions, affections, and cares which prevent him communicating these graces.

"Those who are in this habitual state pray with facility, and possess in their characters the special grace of the Holy Spirit for the practice of the theological virtues, so that when they wish they can make acts of these virtues after having raised their hearts to God to obtain his help, which is never withheld from them.

"There is another kind of contemplation, more exalted, which consists in raptures, ecstasies, visions, and other extraordinary effects" (*ibid.*, ch. iv, art. 1).

407. To this gift of contemplation is closely united that of the presence of God.

"It is in vain that we strive to realize the presence of God if he do not show himself to us, for this is a gift of pure mercy. But if we have received it, by and in this presence we see God and know the will of God as to our actions, and at the same time we see the light and the substance which it reveals to us. This grace is the fruit of great purity of heart, and it leads the soul to a close union with God. It is bestowed on us when, on our part, we have done all that lay in our power and all that we ought to do" (*ibid.*, art. 2).

408. The advantages of contemplation are very great, and there is nothing more desirable.

"Contemplation is true wisdom. It is much recommended in the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, and Ecclesiasticus. Those who dissuade others from it commit a serious fault. It is not at all dangerous when practised with the requisite dispositions. It is true that in the state of rapture and ecstasy there is danger of illusion, especially if grace should still be weak and the soul unaccustomed to such things; but there is not the least danger in contemplation.

"In the first epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians you see that the most marvellous gifts of God were quite usual with the first Christians—the gift of tongues, that of healing the sick and of working miracles, the gift of prophecy and of the discernment of spirits; and the holy Apostle exhorts the faithful to desire spiritual gifts and particularly that of prophecy, which consists not only in foretelling future events, but in understanding Holy Scripture and being able to explain it to others and to instruct them.

"At present, if anyone aspires to some gift of prayer a

little above the ordinary, he is immediately informed that this is an extraordinary gift which God only bestows on whom, and at what time, he pleases, and that it is neither to be desired nor asked for, and thus the door of these gifts is closed to him for ever. This is a serious abuse. It is true that one must not intrude oneself into this kind of prayer, but also one must not refuse it when it is offered by God, nor do anything positively to prevent God from leading us into it when he pleases" (ch. iv, art. 3).

409. "In order that intercourse with the world may not harm us in exercising those functions by which we hope to lead men to God, it must be stated that our lives ought to be such a mixture of action and contemplation that the former should be animated, directed, and controlled by the latter, so that in the exterior works of the active life we should always enjoy the interior peace of contemplation, and thus our occupations would prove no impediment to our union with God, but rather serve to bind us more closely and more lovingly to him, making us embrace him in contemplation while serving our neighbour in action" (*Fourth Princ.*, ch. iv, art. 3).

"As to us who are called to an apostolic Order in which we must unite action to contemplation, we can, without presumption, aspire to the highest degree of excellence both in the contemplative and active life. For it is not presumption to aspire to the perfection of one's state and to the accomplishment of the designs of God to the full extent of one's vocation" (*ibid.*, art. 4).

410. The most celebrated disciples of Fr.Lallemant were the Venerable Fr. Maunoir and Fr. Surin, both of whom, following in the footsteps of their master, carried virtue to heroism. The latter has written a good deal.[1] It can be perceived in his writings that he was inspired by the great masters, and especially by St Teresa and St John of the Cross; but one feels also that to the knowledge thus acquired he has added his own personal experience, and that acquired in his direction of saintly souls. No other author has more frequently insisted on the great gain, the spiritual riches, lights, and feelings, the peace and satisfaction that, according to him, and attested by his own experience,[2] God never fails to bestow on souls entirely

[1] The greater number of these works have been re-issued in our days at the Librairie Saint-Paul, Fue de Lille 51, Paris.

[2] He specially remarks, speaking of contemplation: "I can affirm that among all those who have given themselves entirely to God, *I have not found one who has not received this gift,* after having practised themselves for some time in meditation on the mysteries and truths of the Faith" (*Dialogues,* t. i, l. IV, ch. ii).

detached and arrived at a state of perfect love. He very justly distinguishes between the graces which are *within the order of faith* from those others which are *outside the order of faith* and are neither to be desired nor expected. But he often reverts to the former, persuaded that the hope of obtaining such priceless gifts would sustain and animate the souls of those who are aiming at perfection.

13. *The antimystic reaction in the seventeenth century.*

410 *a*. The traditional doctrine being at the opening of the seventeenth century much in favour with spiritual authors of standing, it would seem that nothing ought to have obstructed so consoling a movement, very happily described by an author of our own days as "the invasion of mysticism."[1] But there remained hostile critics like those we have alluded to at the end of the preceding century, who showed great suspicion about contemplative ways.

The chief of these were the Jansenists, and principally Nicole. "He," said M. Brémond, "contributed more than any other to precipitate the downfall of our mystics, to de-mysticise the second half of the century in which reigned Louis XIV."[2] In 1666 he began his attack by bringing out *The Visionaries*, then in 1679 he published his *Treatise on Prayer*, which had a great success, and which was intended to discredit contemplative prayer. Understanding nothing about this prayer, which was not practised by him, Nicole foolishly imagined that what the mystics related about it was pure fiction; his arguments, feeble as they were, struck those, always the most numerous, who, like him, had no experience of mystical graces.

The opponents of Jansenism did not offer any defence of the true doctrine on this point. "They themselves," says Fr. Brou, "had suffered (from Jansenism). They had felt the influence of these depressing and sterilizing polemics. Too much intellectual power had been exerted against these enemies within the fortress." M. Brémond, who quotes these words, adds: "If the question of Jansenism

[1] Brémond, *Hist. littér. du sentim. relig.*, t. ii. Everyone knows that M. Brémond, in his volumes which are so interesting, as lifelike as they are learned, has already admirably described the ebb and flow of the wave of mysticism at this epoch. Doubtless the volumes which are impatiently awaited by his readers will succeed in making this important page of the religious history of France very well known.

[2] *Op. cit.*, IV, p. 587.

had not for so long a time absorbed the living force of Catholicism in France, this might have, if not altogether prevented, at least retarded the retreat of mysticism."[1]

Besides, among many of the adversaries of Jansenism, the tendency to prefer the methodical prayer of the *Exercises* to every other kind of prayer had not disappeared; even the disciples of FF. Lallemant, Surin, Le Gaudier, Huby, etc., hardly liked their doctrine.[2] After the death of these venerated authors the antagonism to the mystical life made great progress.

14. *Abuse of mystical doctrines.*

411. About the same period some deplorable abuses committed by the partisans of mysticism gave colour to the opposition. Imprudent and ignorant persons without any discernment applied the rules of the contemplative life to those whom it did not concern. St Teresa had already been obliged to recall to the path of humility those who presumed to raise themselves by their own efforts, before the time appointed by God, to the state of contemplation. Fr. Lallemant points out the same abuse among certain directors.

"Directors," said he, "commit two faults with regard to contemplation. Some, not very spiritual and overtimid, shut the door completely against the souls they are directing and prevent them entering, although they are called to it by God. Others, on the contrary, make all the world enter in, and speak of nothing else but the prayer of simple glance, of extraordinary graces, interior locutions, visions, revelations, and ecstasies" (*Seventh Princ.*, ch. iv, art. 1).

412. At the end of the century, in 1671, Fr. Boudon, Archdeacon of Evreux, a man celebrated for his great virtue, made the same complaint. He quotes the testimony of a Carmelite of saintly memory—Mother Madeleine of St Joseph. This holy religious said: "A great abuse is taking place in our day under pretext of lofty elevations to God in prayer, which places souls in a false state of admirable union like that of St Catherine of Genoa. Certain persons make use of extraordinary expressions, all their illuminations are rapturous, but the misfortune is that the ecstasy of operation does not follow that of imagination. While their minds are raised to the

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 315, 316.

[2] The words of Fr. Lallemant quoted above (No. 408) give it to be understood, and still more clearly many passages of the books of Fr. Surin.

most sublime things, their hearts are engaged in the lowest affections; they speak the language of angels, yet live a very human life; and what is most deplorable is that generally they do not recognize their delusion. As they speak of and imagine only the highest things, they suppose themselves to be very superior, and their directors think the same and are deceived like them" (*The Reign of God in Mental Prayer*, ch. xiii).

413. The pious Archdeacon believed that in renewing the distinction between active and passive contemplation this danger might be avoided. He greatly recommends the first method, warning those who practise it to recognize that they are very far from the second. The division allowed by him in no way answers to that established by the theologians we have previously quoted, of an acquired contemplation and an infused. That which Boudon describes under the name of active contemplation is no other than ordinary contemplation, common to all. "God is regarded neither with affirmation, nor negation, nor in any particular species, but as being universal, raised above all knowledge and created capacity" (ch. xv). It is of this contemplation that the Venerable John of the Cross has given the rules (ch. xv); it is practised in the depths of the soul by simple attention and acquiescence (ch. xvii).

Boudon gives some excellent advice on these mystical questions with the competency of a man who knows by experience the subject of which he is treating. The weak point of his doctrine, however, is the distinction he tries to establish (ch. xx) between active and passive contemplation, a distinction absolutely lacking in clearness and precision, and which only marks out differences of degree[1] between one and the other, without any real essential difference.[2]

414. The abuse which has just been pointed out, consisting in an intemperate and dangerous application of mystical doctrines to souls whom they do not concern, became still more marked and gave birth to Quietism, the dangerous doctrines of which began to spread just at this time. Not only did the Quietists wish to make contemplatives of all the faithful indiscriminately, but also, according to Molinos, to become perfect it was sufficient to devote oneself to contemplation. Therefore everything else was a

[1] There is *more* light, the attractions are *more* powerful, etc.

[2] There is nothing plain but this: "In the passive state *sometimes* the intelligible species are infused without the intervention of the imagination," which constitutes a real miracle and certainly changes the kind of contemplation; but a distinction cannot be founded on what occurs *sometimes*.

matter of indifference, good or evil, and consequently one might neglect the practice of virtue, and consider moral disorders of the gravest kind as not being sinful.

Other Quietists (Madame Guyon, Lacombe) did not admire these enormities, but they also claimed to bring contemplative prayer within reach of all the faithful, no matter what was their state, and thus to afford them the shortest, easiest, and most certain means of arriving at perfection.

Molinos had done immense harm; he had deceived the Pope and several cardinals; he had misled a considerable number of poor souls, and the evil had spread; Italy become infected. A strong curb became necessary; not only was Molinos' book (*The Spiritual Guide*) condemned with the works of Fr. Lacombe and Madame Guyon, but the Holy Office prohibited also whatever books the Quietists might make use of to support their doctrines, even if they should only contain a few slight errors.[1] This measure, dictated by prudence, brought great discredit on mysticism.

415. The reader doubtless bears in mind the famous discussion between Bossuet and Fénélon. The latter was certainly further from the pure mystical doctrine than Canfield, Surin, de Bernières, but he believed and insisted that he reproduced the teaching of the best masters, and many believed as he did. At the distance that we are from this controversy it is difficult for us to understand how fiery the conflict was. Is it necessary to remark that even those who were incapable of rightly grasping the subjects in question took part in it? And also that there could not fail to be, among the partisans of the two illustrious antagonists, some manifest and regrettable exaggerations, some going back to the errors which we have pointed out and abusing mystical doctrines, others beyond measure suspicious of or disdaining contemplative prayer.

This was decidedly not the attitude of Bossuet. I have shown elsewhere[2] how well he knew how to bear witness

[1] A learned consultor of the Holy Office, Fr. Pius de Langogne, who later became Mgr. Sabaden, related to me how he had searched the archives of the Holy Office and had read the report of the examination which ended in the condemnation of the *Interior Christian* of M. de Bernières; the book did, in fact, contain some inaccuracies of doctrine, but in these days, the eminent religious assured me, such slight errors would not call for condemnation. In this way works which might have proved dangerous in the circumstances were prohibited because the subjects had not been sufficiently weighed, although, having been compared by true mystics, they could give excellent advice and might have done much good; for example, *The Rule of Perfection*, by Canfield; *The Spiritual Catechism*, by Surin, of which only the Italian translation was examined.

[2] *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, t. ii, *passim*.

to the excellence of this method of prayer, and the same can be said of the two other prelates who opposed the Archbishop of Cambrai. It is no less true that, in consequence of this controversy, mystical doctrines became suspect to many.

Unhappily, also, the great Bishop of Meaux did not always describe very accurately what he called "passive prayer." According to him, in this prayer, in which he would include all the prayer of repose or quiet of St Teresa, and that of the simple presence and simple surrender to God of St Francis de Sales, the power of making discursive prayer *is altogether lacking*, and God, by an extraordinary operation, himself binds the faculties of the soul, rendering them powerless to act (*Instruc. on the States of Prayer*, l. VII). By this misconception Bossuet was naturally led to conclude that this was a state of prayer entirely extraordinary and miraculous, a method of prayer new in the Church and unknown to St Basil, St Gregory Nazienzen, St Cyprian, St Chrysostom, St Ambrose, St Augustine, or St Bernard; a kind of prayer, he repeats, which "of itself does not make a man better," and to which—Bossuet does not say this, but it is a conclusion which forces itself on one—it would be useless and even rash to aspire.

It can be understood how inexact was the interpretation of the teaching of St Teresa and of St John of the Cross, of St Francis de Sales and St Jane Chantal, and of all the masters in general. Unfortunately the great authority of Bossuet gave him credit. The *Instructions on the States of Prayer* (1697) was much more widely read than his admirable work on *The Prayer of the Presence of God*, or than his spiritual letters,[1] the doctrine of which is much more in keeping with that of the saints. Thus mysticism, misshapen and attacked by some, and misrepresented by others, and having, so to say, no exact and authorized defender, fell into disfavour, and from this time the distrust of every kind of contemplative prayer and of all mystical doctrine increased.

Many proofs of this distrust exist. I will cite the following facts:

In 1688 the Definitor-General of the Carmelites gave out a decree forbidding the admission of mystical books or of any treating of prayer, "since mystical subjects, even when carefully examined, are subject to censure and suspected of being harmful to religion" (*critical edition of the works of St John of the Cross*, t. iii, p. 212).

[1] Among others, see his letters addressed to a young lady of Metz. They are very beautiful.

The ancient *Holy Year* of the Religious of the Visitation, and the *Lives of our First Mothers*, composed by Mother de Chaugy, having to be printed for the whole Order, were submitted to curtailment which deprived them of a great part of the charming naïvéte of the original manuscripts. Here is what Mother de Lucinge, Superioress of the first convent, wrote to Mother de Lenoncourt, Superioress at Pont-à-Mousson, in 1693, at the time when the convent at Annecy was working at the printing of these books: "We spare neither care nor trouble . . . to carry on . . . the printing desired by the Institute. But I tell you in confidence that the Canon appointed by Mgr. our Prelate to examine our printing is obliged in some way to curtail much that dealt with interior states and with prayer, on account of those novelties that have caused so much commotion in Rome and in France. Everything lies under suspicion of error, and without the greatest caution one can hardly dare speak on these subjects" (*V. Année sainte de la Visitation*, Vie de la Mère Aimée Bénigne de Lucinge, t. iv, p. 396).

Some years later the errors of Madame de Guyon and of Fénélon having still more accentuated this distrust, Honorius of St Mary wrote in the preface to his work on contemplation (1708): "The learned . . . do not always sufficiently show the difference between the spiritual maxims of true and false mysticism. . . . They *nearly all* hold that passive contemplation should be ranked among miracles, that it is a state subject to many illusions, and that it is very difficult to keep in its paths, that its mysteries are impenetrable and cannot be explained in words. . . . One can scarcely speak of the mystical life without being taken either for a Quietist or a visionary. Interior ways are looked upon as sufficiently honoured by the title of 'pious reveries.'"

In scanning the biographical notices of deceased Sisters communicated by circular letters from one convent of the Visitation to another and addressed to the whole Order, a notable change may be observed between those of the earlier times of the Institute and those of the eighteenth century. At the beginning it was usual to make known the state of prayer and the interior attractions of each religious in relating her life; after the controversy on Quietism much greater reserve was kept on this subject, and less mention is made of it as the century advances.

CHAPTER X

MYSTICISM SINCE THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1. *First half of the eighteenth century.*

Caussade, St John Baptist de la Salle.

416. It was especially in the eighteenth century that the prejudice against contemplation became very common; it even seemed that people avoided pronouncing the name. The works of the Masters, it is true, remained, and many souls continued to draw from them the true doctrine, but with others there was a tendency to add commentaries and explanations that altered and falsified it. It can be said thus that the decadence of mysticism followed that of philosophy and theology, which, as is well known, suffered a veritable eclipse at this time. Was it not the time when Cartesianism, Ontologism, Gallicanism, and Rigorism flourished? Darkness seemed to have encompassed the world at that time, and the words of the Psalmist can be applied to it, *diminutae sunt veritates a filiis hominum*, the children of men have diminished the truth.

417. Of all the writers, the one who best understood the traditional doctrine was Fr. de Caussade of the Society of Jesus. In 1741 he brought out his *Spiritual Instructions on the States of Prayer*, in which, while prudently sheltering himself under the patronage of Bossuet, he gave an excellent instruction on contemplative prayer even more accurate and more true to the teaching of the Masters than the illustrious Bishop of Meaux had been able to give, at least in his first works.

418. Two years before, in 1739, the explanation of the method of prayer by St John Baptist de la Salle had appeared. Now this is how the holy founder of the Brothers of Christian Doctrine speaks of the practice of the presence of God by a simple attention.

"A person who has applied himself to prayer for a long time and who has acquired facility in placing himself interiorly in the presence of God, has usually only to keep his mind recollected and to preserve a simple attention to the presence of God in order to have his mind engaged and steadily fixed, at least while he is making his prayer, without any wandering during the time. And this simple

attention produces interior consolation in the soul which gives him pleasure, and makes him enjoy this thought, and prevents the necessity of other thoughts or reflections in order to fix his mind, because this simple attention without any especial design, and without any reversion to self, so strongly takes possession of the mind and so completely penetrates the heart, that far from requiring other thoughts or other affections but for God, neither can be admitted.

"It is by means of this simple attention that the soul disencumbers itself entirely of all created things and enters into a clearer knowledge of the being of God and of his divine perfections, and a more intimate union with him; because God, who possesses that soul, and is interiorly possessed by it, cannot suffer in it anything that is not from him or for him. Therefore, there is no longer anything in the soul which is not according to the idea of it in the mind of God, nor anything merely natural.

"When a soul has become sufficiently purified, and freed from the least sin in order to enter at once into this disposition of simple attention to the presence of God, it makes progress (in the practice of virtue and in the exercise of prayer and of fidelity to the presence of God) in a much shorter time and much more easily, and every difficulty is smoothed away. But he who desires to enter this path without delay should be careful to watch over himself, and to free himself from every attachment, even though it be natural, for God does not bestow this grace save on very pure souls, or souls that he wishes himself to purify in this way by an especial grace."

2. *Second half of the eighteenth century. Scaramelli, St Alphonsus Liguori, Grou.*

419. St John Baptist de la Salle simply reiterated the traditional doctrine. Several years later another writer brought out a work which does not deserve the same eulogy. This writer, Scaramelli, enjoyed a repute truly inexplicable, for his importance does not exceed that of the third-rate authors.

Scaramelli indicates two roads leading to perfection. One, the more common, and the only desirable one, is that from which contemplation is excluded. It is set forth and taught by him in his first work, *Direttorio Ascetico*. The other is exceptional and to be feared rather than desired on account of its innumerable dangers and terrible trials; this is the contemplative or mystical way (*Direttorio Mistico*,

Trat. I, ch. i, No. 10; Marietti, Turin, 1900, p. 6). "Ought one not, in seeking after perfection, to prefer the beaten tracks, and to consider oneself unworthy of extraordinary graces? Now, among those who attain perfection, very few are led by God in contemplative ways" (*Diret. ascet.*, Introd., No. 2).

We have travelled far here, be it understood, from the doctrine universally taught in former ages; it can also be perceived that Scaramelli has brought forward no testimony in support of such an assertion, and further, treating of the desire for supernatural contemplation, he recognized that the doctors of the preceding period, Philip of the Holy Trinity, Laurea, and other authors of note, gave their approval to this desire, without appearing to think that in this they were doing other than echoing the great masters; as for him, he declared that he dared not contradict such learned men—as, however, he had been doing from the outset (No. 10)—"and even," he continues, "I am of their opinion," and yet he immediately writes whole pages to establish the contrary (Trat. III, ch. xxxii, p. 308, Marietti ed.). He makes a concession, it is true. Although from the beginning of his work he has condemned all desire for contemplation in general, he shows himself in this part more leniently inclined towards what he calls "acquired contemplation." But one cannot see why, for, according to him, this sort of contemplation also requires extraordinary light, and carries a man beyond his natural powers, or operations, which are discursive, to place him in a state of vision more angelic than human, and finally in his eyes it is no more an ordinary means of gaining perfection than the other. Also every reason he brings forward in condemnation of the desire for what he calls infused or supernatural contemplation might equally be alleged against acquired contemplation.

420. Scaramelli does not understand the distinction between acquired and infused contemplation as did the writers of the preceding century. To him there seemed very little difference between them, and to distinguish them in this way was to push the matter of division too far: *due specie di contemplazioni piuttosto infime o atome che subalterne.* There is not, therefore, much difference between them, and, in fact, the differences he notices are not really essential: the one invades the soul gradually, the other suddenly; the one takes place only during prayer, the other at any other time; the one has only the truths that have been considered for object, the other often

has for object truths that have not even been thought of before; in the one the light is clearer and more vivid, the admiration more profound, the love more ardent, and the mind less subject to troubles caused by the imagination, and no longer able to turn to other thoughts as is possible in the other. The truth is that the soul is carried away more or less forcibly in contemplation according as the light imparted be more or less strong; but this constitutes a distinction in quantity, not in quality; a difference of degree, not of kind.

421. If Bossuet regarded the prayer that he called "passive" as an altogether extraordinary state, it was, as we have said, because he exaggerated the powerlessness of contemplatives to discuss the matter; he saw in it the result of a special intervention of God restraining the faculties of the soul.

Scaramelli from an inaccurate principle arrives at the same conclusion. "Man," says he, "is by nature a reasonable being, and it is step by step, and by reasoning that he should arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Now, in contemplation, he arrives by the help of a simple glance at a deep insight into the truth; therefore, he goes beyond his nature to enter into a mode of knowledge which belongs only to God and the angels. The knowledge acquired in meditation is the only knowledge in harmony with human nature; and this is why we cannot aspire to any other."

The reader will soon discover the weakness of this argument. That which makes a man go beyond his nature and gives him a mode of knowledge characteristic of the angelic nature, is effected solely by the contemplation that has no admixture of anything sensible and is purely intellectual, as Suarez so well explains (see above No. 370). But, should the contemplative, enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, pause to consider the divine greatness, there would be nothing in this contrary to the natural order. The theologians of the preceding century reasoned much more justly. They said that, contemplation being an attention of the mind, it is that part of the mind that sees without reasoning, which is enlightened by grace in contemplation. The human mind is intuitive before becoming discursive; it therefore grasps first principles without reasoning;[1] it apprehends them by simple intuition of its superior intelligence, which receives the contemplative gifts, as it is the reason, or inferior intelligence, which is

[1] For example, that the whole is greater than its part, order is preferable to disorder, there is no effect without a cause, etc.

enlightened in meditation. In either case grace accommodates itself to nature without doing violence to it, without making it perform acts in opposition to its essence.

Scaramelli—and this author gives us to believe by what he writes that he has no experimental knowledge of contemplation—insists on the strange declaration that contemplation is not in harmony with the nature of the human mind (Trat. II, ch. iv and vi); this is to him a fundamental principle. Hence we conjecture that in his eyes contemplation has an altogether extraordinary character; that it has only a distant connection with perfection, so that the desire of such a favour would be as reprehensible, and as little consistent with humility as would be a wish to become a bishop or pope (Trat. III, ch. xxxiii).

422. With such doctrines the contemplatives themselves would not recognize themselves as such; unless rapt in ecstasy they would never imagine that they were in a state of contemplation. Must a passage in the writings of St Alphonsus Liguori be explained by, and attributed to, the influence of this new school?—as most decidedly it canot be applied to ordinary contemplative prayer, such as the other Masters have described it. In the short treatise on mysticism found in his works, sometimes added to the *Homo Apostolicus*, sometimes to the *Praxis Confessarii*, the holy doctor speaks of the passive state as a state in which the soul *does not merit because it no longer acts, etsi non mereatur, quia eo tempore non operatur* (*Praxis*, 127). Would not such a state be miraculous? St Alphonsus gives the name of supernatural prayer to that effected by God by means of an extraordinary grace, which places the soul in the passive state (133). Having accepted this conception of supernatural contemplation, it is explained further (143) that he desires to correct St John of the Cross and those authors who teach that it is desirable to aspire to contemplative gifts. According to St Alphonsus, this desire is only justifiable for those who are already favoured with these gifts, and in his opinion these are in the minority. *Paucissimae sunt animae illae quae diriguntur a Deo per vias supernaturales* (136). The holy doctor says that he borrows this phrase from St Teresa, and in this he was certainly deceived by some second-hand writer, or some faulty translation, for the saint, besides understanding very differently the states of supernatural prayer, always expressly teaches the contrary.[1] By con-

[1] The editors, who have carefully pointed out the references to all the other quotations from St Teresa made by the holy doctor, have given no indication for this one, and with reason.

trast with this phrase, which reflects the ideas in circulation at this time, there are other passages also treating of mystical questions, in which the saint sets forth clearly and distinctly some very true ideas and wise counsels.[1] I have gladly reproduced them in another work (*Degrees of the Spiritual Life*).

423. It will suffice to mention here an author who, at the close of the eighteenth century, understood very clearly, as his works prove, the principles of the mystical life, Fr. Grou, a Jesuit, who died in 1803. The reader has only to look through his *Manuel des âmes intérieures* and his *Maximes Spirituelles* to find there, at least on the most important and practical points, the doctrine of the Masters expressed in a very clear and interesting manner.

3. *Mysticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.*

424. The nineteenth century did not give a single mystical author of the first rank to the Church. It is true that the Venerable Libermann put together all that the Masters had written, and united to the study of the great spiritual authors, at least of St Teresa, of St John of the Cross, and of St Francis de Sales, those lights which God imparts to great souls, his own personal experience, and an intimate knowledge of the numerous souls he directed. He has also pointed out in several parts of his writings and letters[2] the road which leads the faithful soul to contemplation; but there he stops; of contemplation itself he speaks very correctly, no doubt, but very briefly and cursorily. Cardinal Pitra, his historian, expresses regret about this, and the regret will be shared by all who have read the works of this holy priest. If he had carried his instructions further we should have had to enter another name on the list of the great Masters of mysticism.

425. The other authors confined themselves to the reproduction of the teaching of their predecessors, and most of them unfortunately attached themselves rather unreasonably to authors of the second or third rank. Thus, contemplation is treated by them as an altogether

[1] It must also be said in all justice that for the pages to which we are alluding St Alphonsus was not so responsible as Fr. Bernard de Castelvetere, for the saintly author did but reproduce an epitome of the work of this author, *Direttorio Mystico*, which appeared in Rome, 1749. The book written by Scaramelli was brought out in 1754; the chapter in which St Alphonsus sets forth the mystical doctrine was written in 1751.

[2] These passages have been reproduced in *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, *passim*.

sublime state, far beyond ordinary ways. The one most in repute, M. Ribet, asserts that mystical acts are produced by the gifts of the Holy Spirit "poured into the soul *with miraculous prodigality*." "The acts of contemplation," he repeats, "are explained by the gifts of wisdom and of understanding *given in a miraculous degree*" (*Myst. div.*, t. iii, ch. iv). Such an assertion, which applies not only to the ecstatic states, but to all contemplative states in general, would have astonished the Fathers and all the great mystics greatly. It is explained by the idea this author had of mystical union, in which according to him the soul *sees*, *feels*, and *enjoys* the union which takes place between itself and God by the gift of his grace.

426. Mystical science has come again entirely into favour in the twentieth century. In the two preceding centuries it had been regarded as a reserved domain, dangerous, very difficult, and useless to explore; at the present time, on the contrary, it is studied with enthusiasm. The number of those who have returned to the original doctrine increases daily.[1]

427. There still remain, however, partisans of the modern theories, for many do not easily resign themselves to the renunciation of doctrines which were taught them in the first instance, and which they had believed for many years to be true, but everything points to the likelihood that these will become more and more rare. This is because, instead of abiding by the opinions of second- or third-rate authors as they had done for too long a time, they now study mysticism from the saints and the doctors of the highest rank, who agree completely on fundamental points, and whose doctrine is so distinct that it cannot fail to triumph. The nineteenth century witnessed the renaissance of theology, philosophy, history, exegesis, and liturgy; the twentieth century has already seen, and will yet see more clearly, the renaissance of mysticism.

[1] In former editions I pointed out these authors, who were already numerous; now I must give up enumerating them.

CHAPTER XI

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

1. *Perfection implies eminent graces.*

428. In all the texts which we have scanned, the reader can perceive the traditional doctrine on the nature of perfection; he can judge whether the abstract at the beginning of this work be a faithful one. From the teaching of all these illustrious and venerable authors does it not appear that perfection can only be attained by special graces (as mentioned in Chapter I), which, while exacting the generous co-operation of the faithful, far exceed their own efforts? By these special graces the divine spirit enlightens the faithful, strengthens them, and renders them capable of practising the most exalted virtues, and of forming intense and frequent acts of love. Whatever reflections we might make on our miseries and nothingness, we should never obtain perfect humility if God did not enlighten us himself, if he did not make us realize our lowliness, and induce us to accept it willingly. However much we might struggle to overcome ourselves, we should never gain true mortification and complete abnegation unless God gave us a greater degree of energy and courage. However much we might endeavour to keep ourselves in the presence of God we should never succeed unless he kept us constantly united to him by ties of love.

429. To raise the soul to a state of perfection, very great graces are required, precious favours, as a pledge on the part of the divine Master of a love of predilection. And on this account perfection seems to us as much a special gift of God as perseverance. The creature might try in vain, but could never say, "having performed so many good works I have acquired a right to salvation, God owes me perseverance"; also he can never say, "I have acquired a right to be raised to the state of perfection, and God cannot in justice refuse it to me." In both cases there is a suitability, but in neither is there a strict right. God owes it to himself to bestow on his creatures the means of attaining their end. This is why he always gives them the graces necessary for their salvation; if they make a bad use of them he is by no means obliged, what-

ever their former good works, to increase his graces in order to ensure their perseverance, likewise whatever may have been their former good works he is by no means bound to give them graces that would raise them to a state of perfection. These eminent graces remain always the fruit of divine liberality; they are rather a gift than the wages of good works.

430. This is a principle of spirituality that it is necessary firmly to establish, because it bears important practical consequences. To represent the state of perfection as a state to which the soul could acquire a right, or even to represent it as the result of our efforts, with the assistance of ordinary grace, would be to hold an incorrect doctrine; to neglect to bring forward this principal and essential element of the state of perfection, that particular operation of God which transforms the soul and communicates a very high degree of strength and love, would be to teach a mutilated spirituality certainly insufficient; and by such teaching souls might be led to dispense with the requisite dispositions, and even to interpose obstacles in the way of this particular action of grace.

431. The Masters whose works we have studied have made us understand the nature of those graces given to perfect souls, by showing us the greater light they manifest in their intimate relation with God and in their prayer. We have seen how the perfect behave in this matter. As they receive from the Holy Spirit precious lights on the divine perfections and goodness, they no longer feel the necessity of exciting the will by reflections. The simple thought of God makes the heart break forth spontaneously into protestations of affection, into ardent petitions, acts of confidence and thanksgiving, and often even finding words of love superfluous, and being incapable of expressing their feelings, they content themselves with thinking of God, with contemplating him, admiring him, aspiring after and loving him. This is the kind of prayer that suits the perfect, the only kind to satisfy them, and when they cannot give themselves up to it as they wish, and when God hides himself from them and prayer becomes difficult and dry, they suffer and sigh; they are like fish out of water. But, nevertheless, the divine action still continues; it is secretly exercised without being felt; it directs them, and shows them the way to God; it makes them long for the divine embrace, and inspires a distaste for all that can distract them from acts of love.

2. Contemplative union the end of the spiritual life.

432. All the Masters are unanimous in holding up to us this kind of prayer as the end to which we should aspire, not only because it contains the practice of love, but also because in practising it in a perfect manner it develops and increases.

But if the faithful aspire to contemplation they ought not to thrust themselves into it before the hour chosen by God, neither ought they to resist the action of God when he wills to introduce them into it. The Masters have pointed out to us these two mistakes. The first error has frequently occurred at certain periods, and has given rise to disastrous results. It is less formidable in our day, yet has to be mentioned, because, should it come to life again, it would produce deplorable consequences. It will suffice to repeat here that only the fervent may aspire to contemplation; also that they should wait patiently for God's time, and for the sure signs of God's will.

433. As for the second mistake by which the call of God is neglected, that call by which the faithful are gently and almost imperceptibly invited to enter the contemplative way; the resistance to this call is much more common in our day. And, unhappily, it is encouraged by those who ought rather to warn beforehand against it. Charged with the direction of souls, they do not know how to instruct them about the divine designs; they actually turn them away from their path. At the time of St Teresa, of St John of the Cross, of St Jane Frances de Chantal, many —as these great saints have pointed out to us—were the victims of this mistake, and many more, unknown to us, suffer also from it in our own days. Although there is now a better knowledge of mysticism, directors are still to be met with who have exaggerated ideas of the sublimity and rarity of contemplation, and who do not recognize the signs of it; consequently, they cannot encourage nor direct the souls called thereto by God. Sometimes, even, obedient to regrettable prejudice, they keep them bound to methods no longer suitable to them, and thus deliberately close the way of contemplation.

Meditation, they say, is a sure road and ought to satisfy us, for it has sufficed to conduct many great souls to heroic virtue; and sometimes they bring forward St John Berchmans as an example. In the first place this example is ill-chosen, for if this saint did not receive the extraordinary favours of visions and ecstasies, the witnesses to his life affirm in the Process of his Beatification that he

was a real contemplative.[1] We know of no canonized saint, except possibly among the martyrs whose heroism was shown forth only in death, of whom it could be proved that he was not raised to contemplation; and, anyhow, it does not follow that those who show signs of the divine call should not be conducted by that way.

But, it is said again, is there not some danger in leaving the beaten tracks and presuming to follow the way of contemplation? You are mistaken, repeat these adversaries of contemplation to the souls who feel drawn to divine union; that is their formula. An author of the seventeenth century, Guilloré, wrote a good-sized book on the illusions of the spiritual life; this book contains 115 chapters, and in nearly every chapter the author denounces some fresh illusion. It has been said of him that, in spite of the length of his list, he had forgotten one, and that was his own, which consisted in seeing illusions everywhere. Those of whom we are speaking are following in the steps of Guilloré. Instead of alarming themselves about imaginary illusions, they ought to fear a more real danger, that of opposing the designs of God, for the signs of a call to contemplation are easy to discern. They would not allow contemplation save to those to whom it is irresistible; but not only the eagles fly in the heights; sparrows fly, though only from bush to bush. Is this a reason for clipping their wings, so that they cannot fly at all?

434. If the works of the Masters were better known and better understood all these prejudices would be speedily done away with, the desire for contemplation would be more universal, and many would make generous efforts to obtain this precious gift. Has it not been with a view to prevent this result, that the reading of the works of the great Masters has, in numberless cases in the past, been forbidden? We have cited Fr. Mercurian. Godescard was afraid that the reading of the works of St John of the Cross might prove dangerous to a great many, and might not many other examples no less strange be mentioned? I know a great Congregation which, by the advice of a religious, had literally put St Francis de Sales' *Treatise on the Love of God* on the Index, although recommended by its Rule. No religious, even if living at the other end of the world, could read it without the express permission of the Superior-General. In many other instances people are looked upon with suspicion and

[1] See his *Life*, by Père Cros, S.J. (l. II, ch. ii).

readily taken for Illuminati, who read the works of St Teresa, or of St John of the Cross.

But St Francis de Sales composed his *Treatise on the Love of God* for nuns of the Visitation. His judgement was so clear and upright that he knew better than anyone else the doctrine that was suitable for them. St Teresa composed her *Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle* for her daughters of Carmel; she also, better than anyone, knew what to teach her fervent nuns. As for the book of her *Life*, she recommends it to those of her daughters who were contemplatives (*Way*, ch. xxv). "This reading," she told them, "will do you good, and greatly console you." The same can be said of the other Masters; they wrote to help souls desirous of perfection; if they had only succeeded in composing works dangerous to the greater number, we must own that these illustrious authors would have proved themselves singularly blundering; but the books they thought proper to compose are useful and practical, otherwise it would be difficult to understand the praises bestowed on them by the Church.

All these prohibitions, all these suspicions of books so remarkable, seem indeed to take their rise in the false notion that some entertain about contemplation, placing it in the ranks of exceptional and almost miraculous favours instead of considering it, as the saints did, as the normal term and crown of the spiritual life, as the most perfect and desirable way of practising affective love.

3. *The way to prepare for the divine union.*

435. Union with God! This, then, is the end to which those who are truly spiritual incessantly tend. It is to be considered as a gift depending on the divine bounty, that no human effort is sufficient to produce. At the same time it must not be forgotten that God only bestows it on those who are well prepared, and that to these God hardly ever refuses it. Drive far from you anything and everything that might prove an obstacle to so great a blessing; do all that depends on yourself, and sooner or later the Lord will grant it to you.

If we examine into the dispositions recommended by the saints as a preparation most certain to obtain this great favour for the faithful, we shall notice that all insist above all things else on recollection and abnegation as a distant preparation, and for an immediate preparation, on regular and fervent prayer, in which the principal considerations are of the divine goodness and perfections.

(1) *Recollection.*

436. Is there anything more active and versatile than the human mind? Thoughts the most diverse; imaginations sometimes most fantastic; suppositions probable or even impossible; desires or fears, hopes or cares, succeed each other almost uninterruptedly in every human mind. The operation of grace can put a stop to this mental agitation, and can fix the attention on a divine object; it can keep the understanding adhering to God in its highest point while the imagination continues its wanderings, but God is not obliged to accord such a favour: he may wait for the free co-operation of the creature, and not act on the understanding by enlightening it with his divine light until it become fit for its reception by driving away profane thoughts and useless preoccupations. Generally grace adapts itself to uature; just as water takes the shape of the vase into which it is poured, so does grace accommodate itself to the recipient. Also all the Masters of the spiritual life have insisted upon the necessity of recollection.

And how rare is perfect recollection! What an effort is required to guard the exterior senses, and to impose on them a strict reserve; it is an effort to keep silence and to abstain from idle words, and a greater effort still to control the imagination. Who is there that does not indulge in his favourite reveries? Who does not find it pleasant and almost necessary to follow at times the current of his thoughts? Persons may be found who appear very energetic, and making hard sacrifices, leading a devout life, practising severe austerities, and yet not succeeding in repelling immoderate preoccupations and useless thoughts. And how many others there are who constantly practise introversion and suffer from continual fears, thus preventing any possibility of practising divine love. These are great obstacles to divine union. Whoever aspires to it should keep his heart as much as possible in peace and tranquillity, and wage a relentless war against his imagination.

St Aloysius Gonzaga received the gift of the presence of God in such a degree that at the end of his life it was impossible to distract him from it; but by what exertions did this saint dispose himself for so great a favour. When quite young he imposed on himself the task of beginning his prayer again until he could pray for a whole hour without distraction.

(2) *Abnegation.*

437. Perfect recollection is very rare, complete abnegation is no less so; those only whose hearts are free from all ill-regulated affections and who desire nothing, nor love anything save the holy will of God, can avoid every idle care and foolish thought, and in like manner they only succeed in becoming entirely detached and indifferent to such a degree as never to allow their thoughts to dwell voluntarily on objects capable of captivating their hearts and exciting feelings of too human a nature. These two virtues, therefore, help each other; they must be practised simultaneously, and both be acquired at the same time. Detachment from the tendencies and exactions of self-love by humility carried to a loving acceptance of and esteem for humiliations[1]—detachment from all the lusts and inclinations of nature by a generous mortification and a joyful patience through all the trials of life; these are the great means of preparing for divine union. Oh! that true humility were more common; if more courage were displayed in the practice of mortification and more fervour and perseverence, there would be many more perfect and contemplative souls.

438. Perhaps it will be useful here to insist on this last point, because the teaching of the Masters on the necessity of mortification is not always understood or applied as it ought to be. As to what concerns the mortification of the will, this is so hard to poor human nature that great encouragement and emphasis on its importance is necessary. The same can be said of trials; there is no subject of exhortation more practical and salutary. One cannot insist too much that trials, whether of short or long duration, whether they happen through events or through human agency, are a grace, a favour from God; they should not only be accepted by the fervent with resignation but endured with love and gratitude. Since they have nothing more at heart than to become holy and to increase in divine love, they have every reason to

[1] Humility is the touchstone of true devotion; it is by the want of humility that false mystics can always be distinguished from true contemplatives. In every age, in fact, persons are to be met with who imagine themselves to have attained high degrees of prayer and of virtue, and who yet have confidence only in themselves, refusing obedience to legitimate authority and showing an obstinacy of judgement carried to the point of scandal. It is quite unnecessary to examine into their spirituality: it can be stated in advance to be false, and that these persons are victims of deplorable illusions.

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rejoice that such a powerful means of improvement and so advantageous an occasion of gaining merit are at their disposal.

439. But, above all, it is on the subject of corporal mortification that certain persons, even among those who make profession of piety, misunderstand the advice of the saints. They do not wish to hear anything else spoken of, either for themselves or for anyone else, but the mortification of the will, or, if they consent to admit of some bodily mortification, it is with so many restrictions that no great effect could result. One would really think that they shared the angelic nature, and that no such thing as original sin had vitiated their human nature. Such was not the opinion of the saints. All without exception regarded their bodies as rebellious slaves, impossible to subdue except by severe treatment or cruel chastisement; all, instead of sparing or taking care of them, made fierce war on them, and gave them no truce, so that the body of this death, as St Paul calls it, instead of being, by its exactions, lusts, and love of good living, a source of weakness and effeminacy, has proved to them a weapon in their combats and the occasion of innumerable victories.

It is impossible to keep up any fervour if bodily mortification be entirely neglected, and it is very frequently the case that souls fall away from their first fervour for want of generosity on this point; it is so easy to slide into lazy ways and a love of ease. Masters of the spiritual life have said decidedly that austerities are indispensable to the soul's progress, and this at a time when conditions of life were much more penitential than now, and imposed even on the least fervent many privations. What shall we say of our age of refinement and luxury, in which all sorts of pleasure and comfort can be so easily procured? We are certainly more exposed than were our ancestors to a life of softness and dissipation; all the more reason to recommend to those who are anxious to advance the practice of mortification, and to urge them on in this path. Getting up in the morning, abstaining from nice things to eat, discarding all superfluities, cheerfully enduring the changes of weather and all the thousand discomforts of life; this is the least to be exacted of a pious person, and if the Spirit of God find him faithful he will inspire him with a desire to do more, to imitate more perfectly him who redeemed us at the price of so many and such great sufferings. Can those who are wrought up to a desire for suffering be opposed and prevented at once by people who imagine that they prove their wisdom by advising

them to content themselves with interior mortification only?

Without doubt, the attraction should be examined, as it might proceed from the imagination, or even from self-love. If it arise manifestly from a heated brain or produce ill-effects, if, for example, it render the practice of zealous works, as well as the fulfilment of the duties of one's state of life really impossible, it should be opposed. But should it produce good fruit, should it render the character more generous or stronger, whoever obstinately prevents it will most assuredly not be blameless; he would expose himself to running counter to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, of contravening his plans full of wisdom, and of preventing the realization of his designs with regard to these persons.

440. St Francis de Sales, in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, written for people in the world, recommends the discipline, the hair shirt,[1] and fasting, on condition that these mortifications be not carried so far as to weaken the body in such a way as to be obliged to indulge it afterwards. In reading the works of ancient spiritual authors, it appears that this abuse of exterior penance was much more common in their time than now; they very rightly blamed these acts of imprudence, but while condemning the abuse, they at the same time approved of and recommended the practice. They were far from considering every penance a danger to health; in our day, on the contrary, if anyone begin to practise fasting and mortification, in however small a degree, he or she cannot have the slightest ailment without having it attributed to the austerities practised.

"Doubtless, daughter," said Fr. de Padranos one day to St Teresa, "God sends you so many maladies to make up for the austerities you do not practise. Do not be afraid, your mortifications will do you no harm." "Teresa," says her historian,[2] "believed him, and found it true—her health improved. At first her penances were a great effort, but, nevertheless, she persevered courageously, and from this time her progress became rapid. The habit of treating her body with severity made it less susceptible to slight maladies, and, besides this, the supernatural motive indicated above was applied more frequently. God sends illnesses to those whom he wishes to

[1] Girdles of iron or hair-cloth, which are much easier to put on and take off, are more frequently made use of in our days than hair-shirts and disciplines.

[2] *Historie de sainte Thérèse*, from the Bollandists, Nantes, Mazeau, 1882 (ch. ix).

sanctify in order to supply for the insufficiency of their penance." "It is to punish too much discretion about mortification," said St Teresa, "that the Lord allows some religious to suffer more than others from illness" (*Way*, ch. x). "He spares those, on the contrary, who chastise their bodies like the great Apostle, and bring them into subjection."

(3) *Prayer.*

441. Recollection and abnegation remove obstacles and attract graces; but it is in prayer particularly that these graces are bestowed on faithful souls. It is chiefly in prayer that God communicates himself to us, and those who neglect this great means of sanctification, who dispense themselves from it easily, who measure exactly the time they intend to give to it, need never expect the favour of divine union. The prayer of a fervent soul should before all things be an exercise of love. At the beginning of the spiritual life the aim of prayer is to make us decide to serve God and to practise virtue, to make us understand wherein lie our true interests, to sustain and fortify our good resolutions. Later, good habits having become rooted, hesitation is at an end, combats become less formidable, and victories more frequent. If we redouble our efforts God will redouble his graces, and becoming more enlightened, we shall aspire to greater virtue, and understand the great importance of true abnegation, perfect humility, and of patience, carried so far as the love of crosses. With what ardour we should ask God to grant us these virtues; this is the prayer that we ought most frequently to make; these are the desires and petitions which should be at the root of all our prayers and which will most efficaciously preserve us from dryness and distractions. At the same time that we are praying for these fundamental virtues we shall be practising them, improving in them, increasing in love, and our only ambition will be that this love may grow more and more, may grow for ever.

Now, that which develops love and which favours the practice of it is the consideration of the goodness of the person beloved; the more we think of him the more do we become struck with his character, and the heart becomes warmer and glows. Therefore, we must consider God, for it is he and his grandeur and goodness which ought to be the most frequent objects of our consideration. All the mysteries of the life and death of Jesus, on which we are in the habit of meditating, can be recalled at pleasure to the memory. When reasonings

have no further attraction we can replace them by a simple glance of faith at God himself and his perfections, which will draw from our hearts acts of love and abandonment.

442. To make this more clear, I subjoin here a short method of prayer for the use of fervent souls, who are beginning to have an attraction for the consideration of the divine perfections, for those especially whom God has already introduced to the unitive way.

(4) *A method for practising the prayer of loving union for the use of those who have an attraction for it.*

To behold God, to love God, is the most perfect prayer. This prayer of love is sometimes bestowed by God himself. He forestalls our efforts; he seizes and raises our souls; he unites them to himself in love. Therefore, even before having made any reflection, we shall become penetrated with his presence, happy with him, and enjoy his intimacy; time passes delightfully, prayer is too short; nevertheless, it is impossible to explain in what it consists, or what is said in it, as no order is followed, and often there is hardly any thought that can be exactly explained. "My God! My God!" this is all that can be said clearly, and nothing further can be specified. Thus, however, without realizing it, a lofty idea of him is acquired, and thereafter his goodness is better understood, his great mercy, and how much he deserves to be loved, to be glorified.

At other times God desires our co-operation; he does not at first take hold of us; he waits till we make some effort to rise to him, or else, after showing himself, he seems to withdraw, distractions follow the act of union and the impulse towards God. In either case we should excite ourselves to acts of love.

Then, having humbled and abased ourselves before God, we should consider his infinite perfections, his greatness that has no limit, his inexhaustible goodness, his infinite power and his holiness. He never changes, yet imparts motion to all things; he knows everything from all eternity, and can never learn; his thought does not travel from one thing to another, because at a glance, and always, it includes every creature, angels, men, animals, insects, plants, drops of water, blades of grass, grains of sand; all that exists, has existed, or will exist, or could exist; all that has happened, is happening, or will happen, or could possibly happen. Whatever we can think of him cannot by any possibility come anywhere near the reality. He resembles nothing of which we have cognizance. He infinitely surpasses all

that we can represent to ourselves. The immensity of space, which makes us giddy to calculate, is nothing beside his immensity. When we say, "He is great, he is good, he is powerful," we have not expressed in the least what he is, for he is infinitely beyond whatever we can imagine. How well, too, to think of the mystery of the ever-Blessed Trinity. The three divine Persons contemplating each other, loving each other infinitely, desiring and possessing each other perfectly; distinct, yet so united that they have but one will, one understanding, one external operation, one infinite glory that they render each other, one infinite happiness that they enjoy, and which no creature has power to disturb or impair in the smallest degree.

When we cannot dwell on these high thoughts and are dazzled at the sight of this infinite grandeur, then it is better to turn to our Lord, who is always so sweet to contemplate: but let us remember that in Jesus, under such a simple and engaging appearance, hides the divinity: yes, this Jesus, so kind and so humble, is the Master of the universe, the Word of God, infinitely loved by the other two Persons, and loving them infinitely. He appears, however, to have forgotten his greatness in interesting himself about us miserable creatures, and has gone so far as to suffer and to die for ungrateful rebels. It is well to begin prayer with a thought of our divine Saviour, of his Heart so loving and so little loved; to bring to mind the Holy Eucharist and the Passion; but we should take care to raise our minds to the thought of the infinite perfections of the Son of God, who became man for us.

When we turn our attention to the saints, and especially to the most holy Virgin, it will be well to behold them as filled with God. God has bestowed on them gifts wholly divine; he has imparted to them some measure of his own perfections and of his nature, and the more they participate in this the more lofty, great, powerful, loving, and worthy of love do they become.

These are the thoughts that should be familiar to fervent souls. Many others will, no doubt, occur to them, and they will return to that which used formerly to be the frequent objects of their meditations, as, for instance, the mysteries of the life of our Lord, the counting up of the favours they have received from God, or which he reserves for them in heaven, but the base and foundation of their prayer should be the thought of the divine greatness, for they have decided to live for God alone and to renounce all self-seeking. As regards the acts of love which ought

to proceed from the heart while at prayer, they will usually flow forth of their own accord as the Holy Spirit gives the attraction. The water is near the surface, the most simple thought will cause it to flow. If the divine Spirit hide himself and leave to the faithful the trouble of drawing these acts of love from the heart, here are some that might be made use of:

Complacent love, to rejoice that God is so perfect, so beautiful, so powerful, so holy. To be satisfied with loving so good a God, and to ask to love him more and more. To desire him, and to rejoice in the possession of him by grace and by his presence in the midst of us. "My beloved is mine, and I am his"; to possess him in Holy Communion, and, more perfectly, one day, in heaven.

Love of predilection: to wish good to God. First to rejoice at the goods he possesses, at the happiness enjoyed by the three divine Persons. Then to desire and pray that exteriorly all his creatures may glorify him. *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*, and first from us, that we ourselves may serve him better and better; that others also may glorify him: *Sanctificetur nomen tuum:* that sinners may be converted,[1] that the good may become perfect, and that there may be many real saints on earth.

Love of conformity: having admired with delight the divine will, so enlightened, so provident, so wise, and so perfectly able to attain its end; to desire and to pray that this will may be done: *Fiat voluntas tua:* I wish, my God, to do all that you require of me. What a joy to sacrifice my inclinations to you, to crush my dislikes under foot; I will obey you in all things, cost what it may. I will respond to the least of the inspirations of your grace; this is my happiness, my nourishment, my life, to do the will of God.

It is also my happiness to *submit*. All that you ordain, all the events of life which only happen by your permission, and which are intended for my good, I accept with all my heart. Should you, perhaps, wish me to remain before you in prayer, but without the power to think,

[1] St Gertrude relates (ii, 15) that wishing to recover the fervour that her slowness in repulsing useless thoughts had caused her to lose she could not, in spite of all her efforts, succeed in regaining it. Then she began to pray for sinners, for the souls in Purgatory, and for the afflicted, and her fervour returned. "I have heard," says St Veronica Giuliani, "an interior voice saying to me that he who wishes to obtain favours should pray for the conversion of sinners, and he will obtain all that he desires. . . . When I feel in any trouble I pray for sinners and it all disappears" (Diary, May 13th, 1697). This thought should help us; while I am struggling feebly against distractions there are sinners at the point of death that only a powerful grace can convert and save.

without feeling, in emptiness and powerlessness, I also will the same, and since it is your will, it pleases me, and I will not only say *Fiat* but *Alleluia*. There are times when this is the only act of love that we can make. We must take care only to annihilate ourselves before the sovereign grandeur and majesty of God in silent admiration; it matters little whether this be done without sensible devotion, so long as it is done sincerely and in a spirit of profound humility, even if we are only free at rare intervals from the distractions by which we are harassed.

Conclusion.

From the knowledge of the divine perfections proceed esteem and admiration. It is impossible not to esteem a God so perfect, and not to delight in him. Satisfaction, therefore, is the first emotion of love, but as yet it is not love itself, and if one is satisfied with admiring and has no wish to do anything for the one admired, it is not true love.

I have explained this elsewhere.[1] It is a sincere will to please God that gives value to the act of love. It is more or less meritorious, according to the purity of the motive that inspires the resolution, according to the energy and firmness with which it is taken, according to the sacrifices made in order to keep it. Even when, without weighing the consequences of the act, we say from our hearts: "My God, I love thee."[1] God sees to what extent this is true; he sees all that we are actually disposed to do for him, how far we are inclined to go on the road of sacrifice. He can see what is the strength of our resolution; he knows what has influenced our determination, whether it is self-interest or admiration of his infinite perfections and pleasure in them; the greater and more profound is the pleasure and attraction towards him, the greater will be the value of our act of love. As God knows what our protestations are worth, so does he see the value of the unexpressed love, that silent and contemplative love, which is content to behold God and to sigh after him. We must leave to God the care of measuring the value of our love; our only care should be to acquire more and more. To effect this we must, for one thing, by the practice of renunciation in all things, by humility, patience, and mortification, strengthen our resolution to refuse nothing to God, and we ought,

[1] *Degrees*, l. IV, ch. i, § 2. *Way*, § 147.

besides, to feed our minds on the thought of his divine perfections. If we faithfully persevere in these practices, if we prove ourselves confident and generous, God will come to our aid with higher graces. He will increase our light to enable us to appreciate more thoroughly his infinite goodness, and he will give us greater strength so that all our sacrifices will become easy. Thus the faithful soul advances rapidly in the path of divine love, *Ibunt de virtute in virtutem,* and, going from virtue to virtue, is given at last to behold the Lord in the heavenly Sion: *videbitur Deus deorum in Sion* (Ps. lxxxiii).

ANALYTICAL INDEX

OF THE PRINCIPAL POINTS OF DOCTRINE TREATED BY THE AUTHORS QUOTED IN THIS WORK

(*The numbers indicate the paragraphs*)

I. The Unitive or Contemplative Way

The three stages of the spiritual life: 28, 31, 32, 33, 37, 39, 61, 80, 83, 97, 149, 350, 364-367, 374, 389*a*, 390. *Cf.* 66, 169

The contemplative state the normal aim of the spiritual life: 29, 34, 39, 40*a*, 46*a*, 46*b*, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 66, 67, 81*a*, 95, 97, 99, 116-118, 143, 144, 148, 149, 156, 157*a*, 169, 172, 178, 192, 199, 213, 224, 234, 245, 306, 328, 350, 358, 374, 386, 388, 389*a*, 390, 391, 393, 396. *Cf.* 51, 80, 85, 86

Nature of the prayer of perfect souls: 34, 39, 43, 45, 71, 85, 86, 122, 172, 180, 247, 278, 280, 328, 364-367

Contemplation is the promised land; it is reached by constancy in labours and conflicts: 75, 143, 379. *Cf.* 174

Rachel, long desired, obtained after hard labours, a figure of contemplation: 132, 135, 144, 349

Contemplation is the crown of spiritual exercises: 158, 192, 199, 215, 229, 231, 244, 294, 343, 358, 374, 377, 397

II. The Prayer of Loving Union or Contemplation

Ideas and descriptions: 42, 44, 46*a*, 65, 68, 71, 81*b*, 92-94, 120-124, 164, 165, 184, 185, 187-189, 194, 205, 207, 210, 217, 231, 247, 250, 263, 271, 277, 278, 294, 336, 353, 359-363, 368-372, 381, 390, 406

Contemplation is a gift: 59, 79, 102-105, 119, 122, 150-156, 174, 177, 179, 194, 206, 222, 232, 279, 299, 302, 312, 316, 335, 376 *ff.*, 387, 389*a*. *Cf.* 32, 33, 41, 64, 65, 129, 206

Contemplation is the result of eminent graces and lights of love:

1. Of lights: 54, 103, 110, 117, 128, 135, 174, 189, 204, 205, 239, 247, 249, 380, 389*a*
2. Of lights and love: 39, 43, 58, 79, 104, 120, 125, 151, 163, 217, 218, 235, 255, 263, 271-274, 293, 335, 354, 362, 363, 390, 406

The object of contemplation:

is God: 39, 40, 42, 47, 50, 86, 97, 104, 113, 114, 123, 131, 133, 170, 216, 239, 253, 353, 381, 390

But God known negatively and perceived confusedly:

31, 63, 66, 69, 121, 125, 204-206, 214, 235, 241, 243, 250, 255, 288, 333, 336, 345, 413, 418

Contemplation considered as a union of the soul with God: 39, 46, 62 *ff.*, 67, 71, 76, 79, 95, 141, 164, 205, 211, 234, 235 243-247, 250, 263, 277, 294, 296, 299, 306, 332, 333, 359, 385, 403, 404

Division of the powers of the soul. Temptations compatible with the exercise of contemplation: 129, 329, 337, 381

Duration of contemplation—its variations: 111, 125-127, 165, 166, 196-199, 217, 244, 254, 255, 303, 310, 330, 340, 363

In what sense the prayer of the perfect may be called continual: 34, 72, 84, 88, 89, 100, 245, 407

The various kinds of contemplation: 42, 44, 93, 94, 123, 165, 312, 338, 406

The various degrees of the contemplative state: 116, 187, 336

Contemplation and meditation: 68, 87, 104, 169, 170, 176, 178, 179, 181, 193, 199-201, 224, 251, 272, 291, 339, 386, 389*a*. *Cf.* 116

Contemplation and vocal prayer: 34, 58, 134, 323

Extraordinary favours which sometimes accompany contemplation:

Ecstasy: 187, 190, 207, 218, 276, 312, 313, 328, 371 381, 406. *Cf.* 292

Visions: 189, 313, 315, 342, 370, 383, 406, 410

Action and contemplation: 127, 130-135, 409

Meanings of words: *Compunction:* 98, 113, 123, 124, 156

Excessus, excedere seipsum: 62, 70, 76, 160, 163, 184-186, 208, 219, 221, 222, 228, 231, 272, 273, 296. *Cf.* 218, 239, 276, 333

Theology or *Mystical Theology:* 53, 54, 57, 58, 67, 74, 141, 204, 224, 271 *ff.*, 278, 309, 326

Spiritual senses: 57, 209, 228

III. Desire for Contemplation

It is quite allowable to desire perfect prayer or contemplation: 29, 41, 46, 57, 65, 76, 81, 90, 95, 107, 110, 145, 149-152, 154, 155, 175, 179, 180, 183, 194, 201, 210, 211, 232, 234, 235, 250, 259, 289, 294, 296, 306, 309, 316, 318, 319, 322, 334, 351, 353, 376, 379, 391, 401, 408, 410. *Cf.* 84, 98

It would be presumptuous to take means to introduce oneself to contemplative prayer: 264, 326, 380, 408. *Cf.* 221, and the paragraphs dealing with the thesis that contemplation is a gift.

IV. Means to be Adopted to Dispose Oneself to Receive the Grace of Contemplation and to Assist its Exercise

Obstacles to be avoided: 202, 215, 290, 298, 395

General summary of the dispositions for contemplation: 30, 39, 40, 46*a*, 46*b*, 69, 76, 85, 86, 88, 89, 106-115, 143, 144, 158, 221, 224, 236, 241, 243, 246, 248-250, 253, 279-292, 306, 316, 321, 353, 382, 389*a*, 396

Purity of heart is a disposition therefor: 39, 40, 48, 56, 76, 89, 214, 245, 267. *Cf.* 404, 405

Purity of heart includes complete detachment and the forsaking of vain thoughts:

Complete detachment: 36, 39, 41, 48, 50, 51, 54, 68, 71-73, 75, 125, 240, 248, 259, 267, 299-302, 322, 418

And consequently mortification: 175, 240, 247, 257, 332, 392

Humility: 64, 86, 109, 221, 268, 332, 355, 356. *Cf.* 55, 240, 274
Acceptance of the trials imposed by Providence: 59, 256, 327, 332, 334, 335
Among these trials must be noted the deprivation of sensible graces given by God to beginners and later on withdrawn for their greater good: 59, 242, 327, 332
The abandonment of vain thoughts supposes exterior recollection: 57, 76, 89, 110, 283
And interior recollection: 88, 89, 111, 114, 133, 171, 177, 178, 249, 256, 258, 324, 375
Lastly, one is disposed for contemplation by the manner of giving oneself to prayer:
(i) By praying in a more affective manner and by aspiration: 90, 91, 308, 324, 325, 396, 397
(ii) By applying oneself to the thought of our Lord, but in such a manner as to consider especially his Godhead: 161, 255, 261, 262, 310, 326
(iii) By leaving sensible things to give oneself to God: 31, 39, 47, 52, 65, 69, 72, 113, 160, 208, 239, 241, 243, 250, 251, 253, 260, 288, 309, *Cf.* 49, 232, 302
(iv) By long perseverance in asking for this gift: 153, 222, 376, 382
And in being faithful to prayer: 76, 159, 285, 307, 323
No state of life excludes contemplative favours: 119, 213, 282, 309

V. The Fruits of Contemplation

The fruits of contemplation in general: 41, 58, 72, 75, 136-139, 171, 180, 247, 250, 255, 293, 304, 335, 354-356, 359
Resemblance to God: 35, 36, 45, 68, 250, 255, 277, 354, 390
Desire of heaven: 42, 123, 210
Serenity and holy indifference: 36, 75, 122
Love of one's neighbour: 158, 167, 213

248.12 S15
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The Life of union with God
TITLE